THE NEW HEAVY 2022

# METAL HAMMER

1 OF 4 COVERS

THE ULTIMATE 2022 PREVIEW

## AVENGED SEVENFOLD
"Expect wacky ideas!"

PLUS
PARKWAY
GHOST
KORN
+ MORE

## ROB HALFORD
The definitive interview

## HALESTORM
Studio exclusive

## TOM MORELLO
Answers your questions

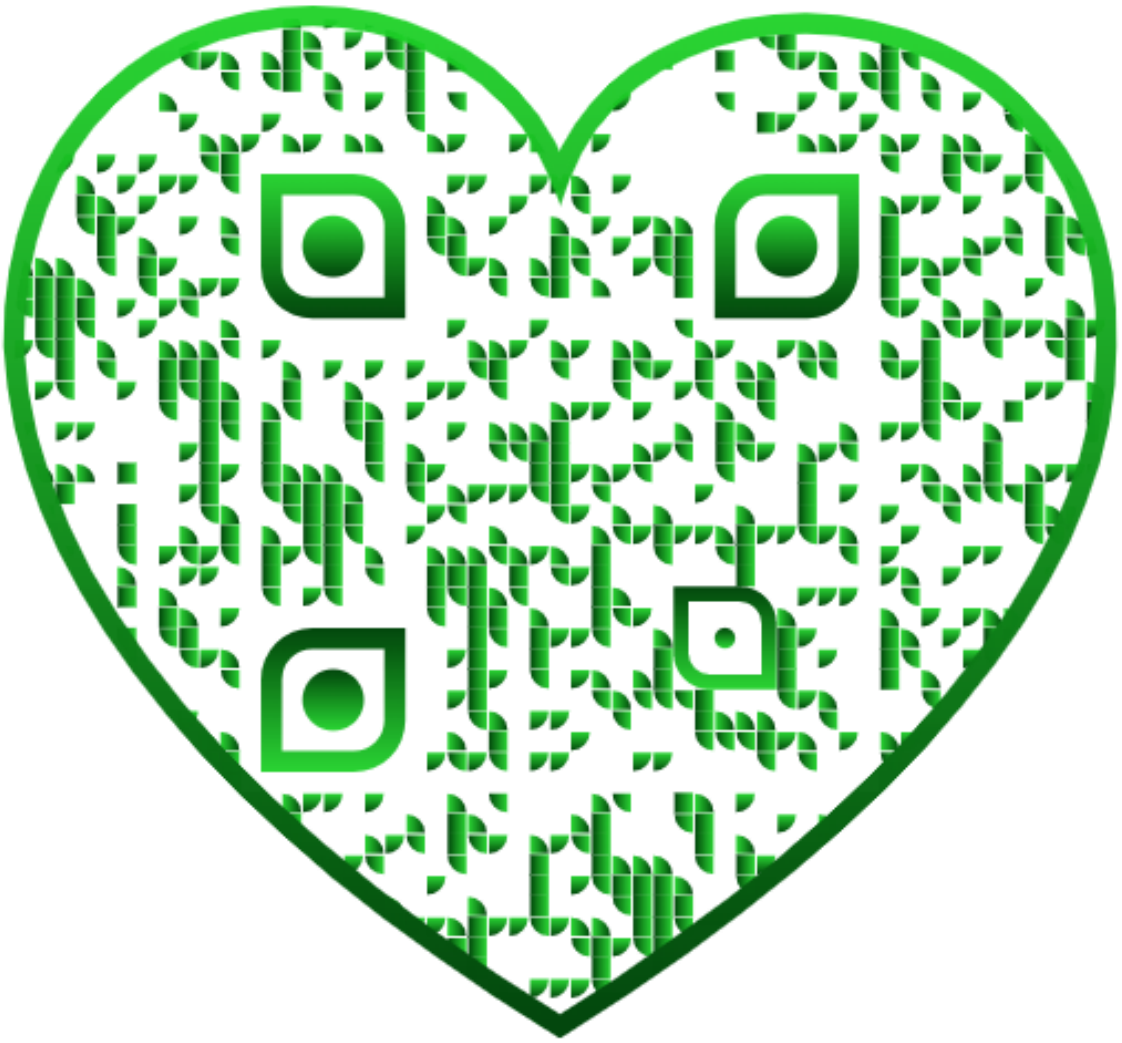
## UNTO OTHERS
Taking goth global

THE RISING STARS

# Spiritbox

BELIEVE THE HYPE

FUTURE
ISSUE 357



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METAL HAMMER

**Future PLC**, 1-10 Praed Mews, Paddington, London, W2 1QY
**Web:** www.metalhammer.com
**Letters:** metalhammer@futurenet.com

**Editorial**
Editor **Merlin Alderslade**
**merlin.alderslade@futurenet.com**
Deputy Editor **Eleanor Goodman**
**eleanor.goodman@futurenet.com**
Production Editor **Vanessa Thorpe**
**vanessa.thorpe@futurenet.com**
Reviews Editor **Jonathan Selzer**
**jonathan.selzer@futurenet.com**
Art Editor **Louise Brock**
**louise.brock@futurenet.com**
Freelance News Editor **Dave Everley**
**dave.everley@futurenet.com**
Content Director – Music **Scott Rowley**

**Contributors**
Steve Appleford, Paul Brannigan, Dean Brown, Cheryl Carter, Richard Chamberlain, Chris Chantler, Alec Chillingworth, Ali Cooper, Joe Daly, Laina Dawes, Alex Deller, Malcolm Dome, John Doran, Dave Everley, Jerry Ewing, Connie Gordon, Spencer Grady, Stephen Hill, Rich Hobson, Emma Johnston, Tyler Damara Kelly, Hannah May Kilroy, Dom Lawson, Dannii Leivers, Dave Ling, Clay Marshall, Sophie Maughan, Edwin McFee, Chris McGarel, Ken McIntyre, Joel McIver, Matt Mills, Ashley Oaken, Tom O'Boyle, Dayal Patterson, Greg Prato, Adam Rees, Alastair Riddell, Elizabeth Scarlett, Yasmine Summan, Nick Thorpe, James Weaver, Christina Wenig, Jon Wiederhorn, Holly Wright, Nik Young

**Cover Photography:** **Loathe:** John McMurtrie **Sleep Token:** Andy Ford
**Spiritbox:** Jonathan Weiner **Zeal & Ardor:** Derek Bremner **MUA:** Gemma Stafford
**Image Manipulation:** Gary Stuckey **Design:** John Woolford

**Photography**
Ben Bentley, Justin Borucki, Derek Bremner, Steve Bright, Janson Bulpin, Stephanie Cabral, Duncan Everson, Nick Fancher, Andy Ford, Mick Hutson, Will Ireland, Simon Kallas, Tina Korhonen, Marie Korner, John McMurtrie, Kevin Nixon, Katja Ogrin, Jake Owens, Tom Russell, Jeremy Saffer, Ester Segarra, James Sharrock, Travis Shinn, Frank White, Jonathan Weiner, Dani Willgress, Neil Zlozower
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**Advertising**
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
**clare.dove@futurenet.com**
Advertising Manager **Helen Hughes**
**helen.hughes@futurenet.com**
Account Director **Olly Papierowski**
**olly.papierowski@futurenet.com**
Account Director **Steven Pyatt**
**steven.pyatt@futurenet.com**

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Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
**licensing@futurenet.com**

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Head of subscriptions **Sharon Todd**

**Circulation**
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

**Production**
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
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Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
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Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

# HAPPY NEW YEAR!

**I HOPE YOU** had a swell festive period, however you decided to spend it, and were allowed some time for rest and reflection after a, quite frankly, bonkers 12 months. Team *Hammer* couldn't be more excited to hit the ground running for 2022, and what better way to embrace new starts than welcoming four of the most exciting young bands around to their own *Metal Hammer* covers for the very first time?

Spiritbox, Zeal & Ardor, Loathe and Sleep Token couldn't be more different from each other musically, but they all share something in common: they've lit a spark under metal by being fearless, individualistic and true to themselves as artists. There are big things in their futures, trust me on that, and we're delighted to play a part in their journeys.

There's plenty more to get excited about in this issue, too, not least our look ahead to what 2022 may hold in store. As well as rumours of new albums from some truly gigantic names, there are plenty more young bands looking to take their next steps towards greatness, as well as – we hope – the proper return of festival season this summer. Let's get stuck in, shall we? Onwards!

**MERLIN ALDERSLADE**
EDITOR
@MERL_ALDERSLADE

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## MEET THE BAND

**ELEANOR GOODMAN**
DEPUTY EDITOR
As if pulling together four cover features and a big 2022 preview wasn't enough, this month El also wrote one of said covers features, chatting to talismanic Spiritbox frontwoman Courtney LaPlante for an enlightening piece on the singer's life.

**JOHN McMURTRIE**
PHOTOGRAPHER
One of our most trusted people behind a lens, John shot one of our four covers this month, putting a dramatic spin on brilliant UK metallers Loathe. He managed not to burn the studio down in the process, too, which is always a bonus.

**DEREK BREMNER**
PHOTOGRAPHER
Also shooting a cover for us this month – his first cover for *Metal Hammer*, in fact – is our Derek, who produced some truly stunning images courtesy of his shoot with Zeal & Ardor mainman Manuel Gagneux. Shout out Derek! Excellent work, sir.

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THE BIG PICTURE

# HANK VON HELVETE 1972-2021

**ON NOVEMBER 19,** news broke that Hans-Erik Dyvik Husby, known to the world as Hank von Helvete, had died aged 49. Known for his time fronting beloved and influential Norwegian death-punks Turbonegro, Hank was one of metal's most idiosyncratic personalities.

Born on June 15, 1972, the singer joined Turbonegro in 1993, ahead of the release of their second album, *Never Is Forever* (1994). He'd go on to appear on a further five Turbonegro records, including 1996 cult hit *Ass Cobra*, which birthed songs covered by Therapy? (*Denim Demon*) and Satyricon (*I Got Erection*), and 2003 comeback album *Scandinavian Leather*, which featured in *Metal Hammer*'s 100 Greatest Metal Albums Of The 21st Century.

While the singer struggled with addiction and mental health issues throughout his career, post-Turbonegro he also created music with Doctor Midnight & The Mercy Cult, as well as his own solo material. Turbonegro confirmed the news of Hank's death on social media, noting: "Actor, romantic and entertainer — through his life Hank left no doubt that he was a man for the stage, loving the spotlight and the room's attention. Our thoughts and hearts go to his family."

GETTY

THE HOT TOPIC

# SABATON'S NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

## The Swedish power metal icons invade a military museum in Belgium to unveil their return to the trenches on upcoming 10th album *The War To End All Wars*

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: TIM TRONCKO

**SABATON ARE NO** strangers to stagecraft. They are, after all, the band that came onstage at Bloodstock 2019 in an honest-to-gods tank (now the world's most threatening drum riser), rising to their status as an arena-headlining band through sheer dogged determination and some of the catchiest European power metal songs in the business.

With their 10th album on the horizon and a litany of rescheduled tour dates looming large (including their first ever full-scale UK arena run), the band shipped a contingent of press out to the Belgian capital of Brussels in November for an educational field trip to the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History for a sneak preview of the new album.

No, Sabaton haven't gone *Star Wars* prequel George Lucas on us to delve into international trade disputes in the EU – rather, they've doubled down on the motifs first laid out in 2019's *The Great War* for a full-on concept record based around the First World War. Taking to the stage amidst cannons and heavy artillery, and with actual fighter planes suspended from the ceiling above, Sabaton never looked more in their element than when they introduced new album *The War To End All Wars* with a live listening session.

"It was kind of terrifying, actually!" bassist Pär Sundström admits. "This album has been completed for such a long time, but none of us have really listened to it in full, so it was kind of painful trying to play it cool watching how people reacted."

With halls stretching out with exhibits covering just about every major conflict in human history (with weapons, vehicles, uniforms and ordinance all on display), the Royal Museum proved to be the perfect environment to hear the band's most ambitious opus to date. On tracks like *Stormtroopers, The Unkillable Solider* and *Dreadnought*, *The War To End All Wars* takes Sabaton's penchant for bombast and storytelling then marries the two in a union of conceptual grandeur that feels more suited to enormous crowds than ever before, like *1917* blown up for Broadway and given a heavy metal soundtrack.

But if you're wondering why the band chose to release another World War I concept record so soon after the last, the answer is simple: there were just too many great stories to pass up. "There are so many different perspectives that make World War I incredibly interesting; it's where the modern world was basically conceived," Pär explains. "When we released *The Great War* we got an onslaught of fan-mail about how great the album was… but we missed the story about this, or that. For us that was great because it gave us a lot of new ideas, but we were aware of a lot of stories that we also wanted to cover but hadn't been able to."

But as Pär tells it, there are some risks to covering a conflict so broad, too: "In 2009, I think we were in Bulgaria, and Joakim [Brodén, vocals] and I were working in some interviews and someone said, 'Bulgarian history is very interesting, you should write a song about our part in the war' and we said, 'Sure, we'll write a song about it some day,'" he says. "Well, we'll never say that again! Since then we've had angry letters with each new album asking where the song about Bulgaria was. Most often it wouldn't fit in with what we were doing on the album at the time – thankfully we finally had an album to make it fit!"

While your average fan won't be able to wander around a museum picking out artefacts that represent specific songs from the record, Sabaton's never-ending thirst for factual content ensures there will be plenty to dive into once the record comes out. By this point, Sabaton are less a cottage industry and more a heavy metal military industrial complex, their work spanning songs, websites, magazines and even a dedicated history channel for fans, as well as a newly designed animated movie that will accompany the release of *The War To End All Wars*.

"We're not just a band that write cool songs," Pär says. "With this album we wanted to offer more than ever – you can hear the album, watch the movie, read articles about the songs on our website and watch other videos on our history channel. We made sure to stay active during the pandemic and now we've got lots to share – we even ended up having to move the history channel from Germany so we could film in Sweden. The history channel is a project we've wanted to launch for so long, I'm so happy people love it and want us to continue going. For the fans it means there's an entire universe to dig into – but it's not Sabaton's universe, it's *everybody's* universe, we're just the storytellers."

***THE WAR TO END ALL WARS* IS OUT ON MARCH 4 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

Sword of Damocles? Pfft! Sabaton opt for a V1 flying bomb above the journalists' heads

**"YOU CAN HEAR THE ALBUM, WATCH THE MOVIE, WATCH THE VIDEOS"**

# 10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

## What's been blowing our tiny brains

### EVERYONE LOVES GOJIRA
At least, the general reaction to them getting our Album Of The Year seems to suggest that! And who'd argue?

### YOU CAN SMELL LIKE TONY IOMMI
The Black Sabbath legend has a new fragrance out! Spray away!

### THERE'S A DEATH METAL BAND CALLED OMICRON
And no, they're not changing their name.

### VENDED DON'T LIKE BEING COMPARED TO SLIPKNOT
Kinda inevitable when your dads are in Slipknot. But at least Vended are actually good, too!

Gojira: feeling the love

### THERE'S SO MUCH MUSIC COMING!
Korn! Zeal! Sabaton! Meshuggah! Ahhh!

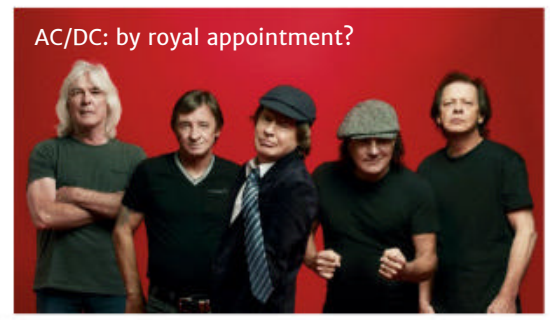
### AND FESTIVAL SEASON 2022 IS GO!
Welcome To Rockville in May, is it?

### PRINCE WILLIAM LIKES AC/DC
Next: we find out Harry is partial to a bit of Gorgoroth.

### IRON MAIDEN HAVE ADDED MORE TOUR DATES
North America is getting a big, fat dose of Legacy Of The Beast!

### ROCK IS WAY BEHIND IN THE MAINSTREAM
No new rock albums made the 200 best-selling records in the US last year. Hmm.

### BUT READING AND LEEDS MIGHT BE EMBRACING ROCK AGAIN
Rage Against The Machine, Bring Me The Horizon, Enter Shikari, Fever 333 and Måneskin getting featured spots? Well, it's a start...


AC/DC: by royal appointment?

# “WILL TRUMP RUN AGAIN IN 2024?”

## Tom Morello talks taking down bigots, missing out on *Star Wars* and Chris Cornell when faced with your questions

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

**TOM MORELLO WEARS** many hats, figuratively speaking: as well as being the guitarist with Rage Against The Machine, Audioslave, Bruce Springsteen and his ongoing The Atlas Underground solo project, he’s an activist, agitator, comic book author and occasional actor. He also wears many hats, literally speaking, because, well, he owns a lot of hats. Either way, there is going to be plenty to talk about as he faces down your questions. “I’ll answer to the best of my ability… or to the degree of which I’m willing,” he warns us before we begin the grilling.

**You’ve been on *Star Trek* and in *Iron Man*. What TV shows or movies would you love to be involved in?**
*Jason Charlton (email)*
“Yeah, I’ve blown my chances to be on the really big ones – *Lord Of The Rings* and *Star Wars* would really round out the nerd profile. JJ Abrams is a friendly acquaintance of mine, and I texted him and said, ‘I would like to be one of the Knights of Ren’ – this is before there was even a script! He told me I didn’t even have to audition and I should just give him a call when I was around. It kills me to say it, but I was never around at that time, so it didn’t happen.”

**How do you feel about some fans telling you to stay away from politics when you rage on social media?**
*@ZainaArekat (Twitter)*
“I have a number of thoughts. One is that you don’t trigger a free speech exemption when you pick up a guitar, that right remains intact. Secondly, people who are offended by my politics on Twitter or Instagram, please know it’s because you weren’t intelligent enough to know what the music that you were listening to all these years was about. For the music, you’re welcome, but if you’re a white supremacist or a proto-fascist, that music isn’t written for you – it’s written against you.”

**Who’s the most challenging person you’ve ever worked with in the studio?**
*Jeanette Simons (email)*
“The producer for the first record I ever made, nice guy, Matt Wallace. Very talented producer, but his vision for my playing was stifling. I had all these toggle noises and effects, and he was like, ‘This doesn’t sound right in songs’ and I had to say, ‘Well, these are new songs.’ I felt like that was a challenge, he wanted keyboards! I was 22 and he was an expert producer, I felt like I wasn’t going to be able to be my best self.”

Rage Against The Machine: a *teeeeensy* bit political, if you hadn’t noticed before

**What is the one piece of advice you gave your son Roman about entering the music business?**
*Iain Leef (email)*
“Don’t, ha ha! I’ve given him zero advice on the industry of the music business, and just advice on enjoying playing and shredding his butt off. That’s the totality of the advice I’ve given him.”

**What’s the most unusual compliment you’ve ever been given?**
*@leperwitch (Twitter)*
“In the early days of touring, in Germany, there was always a guy in the front row who was very enthusiastic and he’d always shout, ‘Kill me with your music, *Tony*!’ at me. I guess that’s kind of a compliment… and a request to be slain, which is pretty metal!”

**Who do you see carrying Rage’s torch forwards? Who are the young rock activists we need to support?**
*Violetta Dunford (email)*
“There’s a great artist called Grandson, who I recently collaborated with on my recent Atlas Underground record. There’s another artist called K.Flay, who I also worked with; Nandi Bushell the drummer prodigy, who worked with my son Roman on the song *The Children Will Rise Up*, I have to put the pair of them on that list as well. The under-12 age group are really flying the flag!”

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE: PRESS.

Shockingly, Tom isn't a fan of Trump...

**"IF YOU'RE A WHITE SUPREMACIST OR A PROTO-FASCIST, THIS MUSIC ISN'T WRITTEN FOR YOU"**

Tom Morello: proud Springsteen fanboy

**What is the greatest guitar solo of all time?**
*Paul Cullis (Facebook)*
"There are a number of candidates! At number three it's Hendrix's *All Along The Watchtower* – it's symphonically composed and incredible. Number two is Page's *Stairway To Heaven* – you can go with the *Led Zep IV* version or the live version from *The Song Remains The Same*. Number one A and number one B are the solos on *Mr Crowley* by Randy Rhoads. You could teach those on a college level musicology course or bang your head in a heavy metal parking lot!"

**How much of an honour was it playing with Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band?**
*Tom Mears (Facebook)*
"Some would call it a lifelong dream, but I never dared to dream something like that up. I am not a casual Bruce Springsteen fan – I am one of those super-weirdo, obsessed Bruce Springsteen fans, so to be part of the mix and be a voice in the room – I'm actually the only other lead vocalist on any Bruce Springsteen album – was unreal. I'd give myself 20 seconds every night on the tour, usually during *Born To Run*, to give myself a moment and really enjoy it, like, 'I'm playing *Born To Run* with Bruce Springsteen in a stadium in South Africa!' That's when I'd lap it up."

**Who is your favourite US presidential candidate from your lifetime?**
*Tom Stephens (Facebook)*
"Imprisoned Native American activist Leonard Peltier. He ran for president, he was a candidate I could get behind. There are a lot of presidents that deserve to be behind bars, but electing someone who is behind bars but doesn't deserve to be there, that's the way that we should be going."

**Who was more fun to tour with: U2 or Wu-Tang Clan?**
*Euan Manson (email)*
"I enjoyed every minute with Wu-Tang, but I didn't see them as much I saw the U2 guys. They would come and go, but I greatly enjoyed the time I spent with them, especially [Wu-Tang linchpin] RZA, who is a lifelong friend. I'm gonna go with U2 on that one just because I spent more time with them. They were the kindest band I've toured with – one of my favourite all-time bands, but just the kindest people you can imagine."

**"I LIKE THE IDEA OF POST MALONE UNLEASHING HIS INNER KORN OVER MY GUITAR TONE"**

**From your perspective, how toxic was the atmosphere at Woodstock '99?**
*Colin Bromley (Facebook)*
"My perspective was that I was only there for 90 minutes, while I played the show. I was at the hotel when it burnt to the ground. My take was that the kids, leaving aside the sexual predators, got a bad rap; they were being exploited and taken advantage of. They were being charged $5 to $10 for a bottle of water; it was antithetical to the original spirit of Woodstock. It was an ocean of gasoline waiting for a match. It also laid bare the worst of the Lollapalooza nation; it began as this diverse group of bands – Nine Inch Nail, Rage, Tool, Pearl Jam – and it merged into the worst of the hair metal and frat boy nonsense."

**What is your favourite memory of Chris Cornell?**
*Joseph Arnold (Facebook)*
"When Rage broke up, Brad [Wilk, drums], Tim [Commerford, bass] and I still wanted to play together, and we kept listening to *Badmotorfinger*. Chris had an amazing voice, but he had a dark, Edgar Allan Poe poetry to him, we wondered what he was really like, so we decided to go talk to him. Rick Rubin came with us and he doesn't leave the house for anything, unless it's in a Rolls Royce inside another Rolls Royce, but he's in my van. Chris lived in LA at the top of the last and loneliest mountain, it was dusk and the sunlight was going and this mansion he lived in was creepy as hell, the gates just opened like Addams Family style, and we drove in and there is Chris, 6'2 and a half, lanky of frame, dark of countenance, and he starts slowly walking towards us and Rick freaked out and goes, 'Let's get the fuck out of here!' We stayed, he was the most loving and generous guy and we were in a band for six years together. That's my first memory of him."

**Do you think Trump will run in 2024?**
*Christy George (email)*
"I'd be surprised if he didn't. And I'd be surprised if he didn't lose again and claim that he had won. I think there is a possibility that the results of that will be even worse than it was this time. He's a sociopath; his dad thought he was such a disappointing loser that he can never publicly admit to losing."

**Who'd be your dream guest for any future Atlas Underground Projects?**
*Darren Hutchins (Facebook)*
"I like the idea of my guitar finding its way into other areas, so I'd say Post Malone. You know what his first ever show was? His dad took him to see Korn! I quite like the idea of Post Malone unleashing his inner Korn over my guitar tone."

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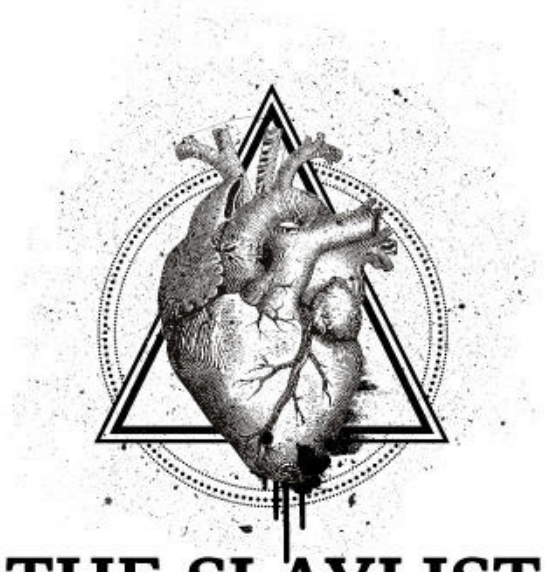

THE SLAYLIST

# TOSIN ABASI

## Guns N' Roses, tech metal and gritty EDM – these are the sounds in Animals As Leaders' shredder-in-chief Tosin Abasi's head

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Tosin has a wide range of musical influences and likes to mesh them all together

**"GROWING UP IN** the 80s, you only heard what you were specifically exposed to. My parents were immigrants from Nigeria, so they didn't buy the Top 40 albums – they were listening to King Sunny Adé or Ebenezer Obey, these old Nigerian cats. But then I'd turn on the radio and hear Madonna, Whitney Houston or **MICHAEL JACKSON**, the big artists at the time. I remember hearing *The Way You Make Me Feel* and that song just gave me *energy*, which made me realise music was cool, because it could change your state.

It was a while until started developing my own taste – around the time Pearl Jam, Nirvana and Weezer were coming up. I did watch a lot of MTV, though, and remember thinking that **GUNS N' ROSES**' *November Rain* was really epic. The lead guitar is more melodic than your usual noodling guitar solo, so even before I got into metal and started filtering certain things out, that song just grabbed me.

With bands like Metallica and Pantera it felt like metal as a genre was fully realised, but then **MESHUGGAH** came along and brought in an entirely different style of rhythmic complexity and aggression. Just listen to a song like *Future Breed Machine* – blistering in its intensity, but Fredrik Thordendal's leads are so melodic it just feels perfect and now it feels like you can find their trace DNA everywhere. For example, there's this band **VILDHJARTA** who do this song *När De Du älskar Kommer Tillbaka Från De Döda*, which means 'When those you love come back from the dead'. They're taking that Meshuggah template and pushing it further – utilising space in a powerful way.

Now if you're looking for a band who do seriously interesting things with rhythm and pitch, you need **CAR BOMB**. They're really crazy – the song *Mordial* has that same kind of precision as you might get with Meshuggah, but they are taking the rhythmic thing further. It's very intense, and *very* complicated. But Meshuggah weren't the only band to really raise the bar for complexity; you also have to give credit to **THE DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN**. We toured with them and they're an insane live band… and just insane in general! So far as originality and complexity goes, The Dillinger Escape Plan lead the charge and you can go back to a record like *Calculating Infinity* and listen to *43% Burnt*, which came out in 1999 and it still sounds like a leap forward even today.

**LISTEN NOW**
Head to **bit.ly/tosinslaylist** to listen to Tosin's mix

It's a huge thing for us to pull our references from outside of metal as well as the usual bands and I personally get a lot of inspiration from jazz. There's a great jazz group called **THE BAD PLUS** who put out this great album, *These Are The Vistas* in 2003 – the opening track *Big Eater* is piano-based with drums and just super-cool. But it's the guitarists that influence me the most – jazz fusion stuff like **ALLAN HOLDSWORTH**'s *City Nights* really inspire me. My playing definitely doesn't sound like Holdsworth's, but it really did inspire my approach to writing and the kinds of notes we try to play in Animals As Leaders because he's really dope.

I pull my sense of harmony from jazz and some shred guitar guys like Steve Vai or Yngwei Malmsteen, but I'm interested in noises that aren't being used in metal – guys like **ADAM ROGERS** and the song *Time And The Infinite* that really open up new worlds, or Kurt Rosenwinkel and Jonathan Kreisberg. Those guitarists have chops on par with your favourite shredder, but the notes they choose are more adventurous and the scales are almost more experimental, its really stimulating to hear.

I really got into electronic music when I started going to raves. There's this group **NOISIA** who have this song *Stigma*, which I think is really sick – as producers they work as a unit and the sound design they've achieved is really top of the game. This isn't EDM in the melodic sense – it's dark, gritty and atmospheric, utilising sound design that wouldn't be possible without modern tools, which I think is great, because it really pushes the boundaries of what we can do with the tools we have available right now." MH

**"DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN WERE INSANE LIVE. AND JUST INSANE IN GENERAL"**

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# WHITECHAPEL

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LIFE LESSONS

# PHIL BOZEMAN

## The Whitechapel singer on rising above loss, tragedy and darkness

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

**PHIL BOZEMAN FACED** down the worst life had to offer early on. The Tennessee-born Whitechapel singer lost both parents by the time he was in his mid-teens – his dad to a heart attack, his troubled mother to drug addiction. Rather than drown in his own misery, he channelled his adolescent turmoil into music. The erstwhile deathcore band's 2018 album, *The Valley*, used his personal experiences as the basis for a vivid journey through a nightmarish imagined landscape. Follow-up album *Kin* picks up where its predecessor left off.

### THE SOUTH HAS ITS OWN FEEL

"I'm from Knoxville, Tennessee, and I still live here. I'm not one of those people who wants to get out as soon as they can. People here are very polite, very hospitable, just good people living the life. We have our stereotypes, people sleeping with their family members. I mean, that stuff does go on, but thankfully it's few and far between."

### YOU GROW INTO COUNTRY MUSIC

"I was surrounded by country music growing up, and I did not like it. Riding on the bus when I was younger, that was all the drivers played. But the older I got, it grew on me and now I love it. I like the 90s stuff – Alan Jackson, Garth Brooks, Brooks And Dunn. It's almost nostalgic in a weird way. It's comforting to hear it. I never thought I'd be saying that."

### CATS ARE COOL, BUT DOGS ARE COOLER

"I'm a dog guy. I've got two. My small one I've had since she was a puppy. My big one is a whippet mix – he's got like four different things in him. I'm not against cats, but you're just taking a risk. You get a cat, it might be super-affectionate, but it might be skittish or straight up mean. With dogs, they're unconditional. They're just like babies."

### HIP HOP IS AN ATTITUDE

"I'm into rap. A lot of Memphis rap like Three 6 Mafia, Houston rap, Southern rap, and a lot of New York stuff like Nas. For me, it's about the groove and the attitude: 'I am who am, this is what I do, I don't care what anyone else thinks.' When can we expect a solo hip hop album? Not any time soon. I don't even know if I can rap. I almost don't want to find out."

### I CAN FIX A TV BECAUSE OF MY DAD

"My dad was a communications guy in the navy. He was well-versed in Morse Code and very hands-on with technical things. He taught me all the basic stuff. I was like the repair guy – I was the one my grandparents would call and say, 'Hey, my TV's not working.' I got a lot of things from him, personality traits. He was a very soft-spoken and low-key kind of guy, and so am I."

### MY DAD'S DEATH WAS A REAL REALITY CHECK

"My dad died when I was 10. The thing that it changed the most was probably my perception of reality and the world. For me, reality didn't really exist – I had no conception of it. At a really young age, you feel like your childhood is going to last forever, and mine was obviously cut short. I had to start growing up at a very young age."

**"WHEN I HEARD MY MOM HAD DIED, I DIDN'T EVEN CRY"**

### MY DAD WAS BASICALLY KEEPING MY MOM ALIVE

"Even when my dad was still here, my mom had alcohol problems, an eating disorder, anorexia. With her drinking, it was a secret – she wouldn't let anyone know, I never smelled alcohol on her. I realised that my mom had issues, but I didn't think it was anything to worry about 'cos I had my dad there. Nothing extreme ever happened. My dad was the rock. Then my dad died, and without him my mom was just a shell of herself."

### CRACK COCAINE HIJACKED MY MOM'S BRAIN

"My mom was a great person, but after my dad passed away she just fell apart. There was no saving her. She just spiralled into bottom of the barrel of darkness. My stepdad was pretty much the one that lit the fuse for her. The signs that he was not a good person started pretty soon after we met him. He lit the fuse and it just kept burning and burning until it exploded."

### I KNEW MY MOM WAS GOING TO DIE

"It wasn't a matter of where as much as when. I was 14, almost 15. When I heard she'd died [of an overdose], I didn't even cry. I was just pissed, because I knew that it was going to happen eventually. Of course I cried afterwards, but my initial reaction was anger, because I knew it could have been prevented. How? We could've run my stepdad out earlier."

### LOSING BOTH OF MY PARENTS MADE ME DESENSITISED TO DEATH

"That all happened around the time the internet was starting to become an actual thing, and I started looking at stuff that was really dark and disturbing. I wanted to see what it's like when somebody actually dies. There's websites with people straight-up getting shot in the face, people falling off buildings and hitting the ground – I've seen all of it. People were, like, 'Why do you want to see that? You must be messed up.' No, I was just curious. Don't get me wrong, it's disturbing, and it ended up making me feel very depressed, but it strengthened my mind."

### BUT I'M STILL AFRAID OF DYING OF COURSE

"We all want to know what death feels like, but we all *don't* want to know at the same time. I don't want to die. Just because I've seen that stuff, doesn't mean I'm not afraid of it. In the movies, it's one thing, but in real life it's way more disturbing, 'cos it's real."

### I DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT I'VE INHERITED FROM MY MOM

"I've maybe inherited some of the anxiety and panic issues, but as far as addiction goes, no. I did start smoking cigarettes at a young age but I quit years ago. I'm terrified of drugs. I've never done anything other than weed. I would never in a million years try crack or heroin.

PRESS

Phil loves country music and rap, but we suspect he'll be sticking with metal for now

That had better not be someone hurling in the next room...

# "I'M TERRIFIED OF VOMITING"

You would literally have to tie me down and force me to do it."

## 'DEATHCORE' IS BOTH A BLESSING AND A CURSE

"We own the fact that's where we come from, but it has made people pigeonhole us. I think metal is one of the most accepting genres of music out there in terms of who you are and what you're like as a person, but it can also be very judgemental when it comes to what people think is cool. I wish people would stop tying bands to one thing: 'You have to stay right here, and you can't go anywhere else.' At the same time, we just don't care. We're going to write whatever we want to write."

## THE WORST THINGS ABOUT STARTING OUT IN A BAND ARE ALSO THE BEST

"On our first tour in 2007, we played to literally no one. This was up in Maine, where nobody knew who we were. Just the novelty of it was amazing - amazing and awful at the same time. But the 36-year-old me would never want to go back and do that again."

## VOMIT TERRIFIES ME

"I'm emetophobic, which is a fear of vomiting. If someone throws up in front of me, I get that heart-drop feeling, but mainly it's just a fear of me vomiting myself. I hate the dread of it, I hate the feeling of it, I hate everything to do with doing it. I'm terrified of it. My worst nightmare happened on a European tour. There was a stomach virus going round the whole tour. Two people would fall ill every single night. I'm an obsessive handwasher, and somehow I didn't get it, but I had this dread all the time."

## IF I HADN'T JOINED WHITECHAPEL, I'D BE DRIVING PORSCHES...

"I used to work in a car dealership when I was younger. Luxury cars – Porsches, Jaguars, Audis. I was the lot guy, taking care of the cars, making them look good. But I got to drive them all the time – you feel like a little bit of a badass, knowing there's people looking at you. I'd probably still be there today if I wasn't in the band. I'd have worked my way up."

## ...OR I MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORKING IN GAMES

"I can't draw for shit, so I'd be a writer and up with these worlds and universes. The storyline on *Kin* is chapter two of [previous album] *The Valley*. It's a fictional take on my teenage self – it's basically the evil part of me has followed me out of The Valley and manifested into a real person. I like to think about weird shit."

**WHITCHAPEL'S *KIN* IS OUT NOW VIA METAL BLADE**

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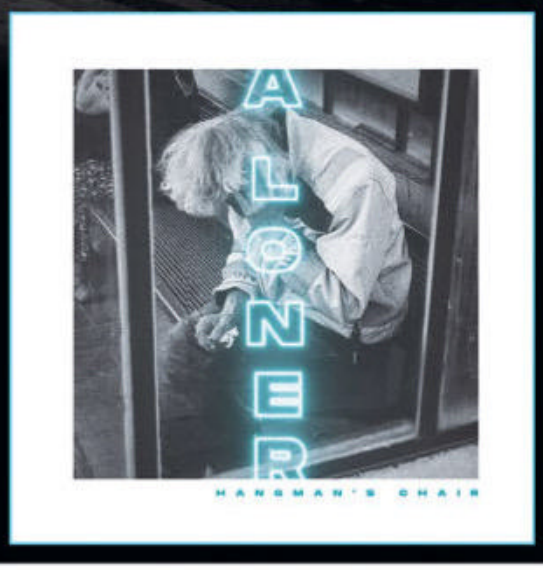


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IN THE STUDIO

# HALESTORM

## Nashville's finest have emerged from the depths of Covid with their biggest-sounding album yet

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURES: JOE HOTTINGER

Lzzy is "going big". We thought her voice was pretty bloody massive before, tbh

**FOUR ALBUMS AND** almost 20 years into their career, Halestorm have amassed an arsenal of gale-force, hard rock anthems that howl and stomp, building hurricane-like around Lzzy Hale's roaring, high drama vocals. Their last album, 2018's *Vicious*, was criticised by some for being too polished and chart friendly, but as Lzzy tells us, for their fifth album, the Nashville-based band went back to basics for their most personal, heaviest album yet.

**How has the recording process been this time around?**
"A lot of the songs I was writing BC – before Covid – all of a sudden didn't make sense to what we were feeling. Due to it being the longest period I've ever gone without a show, that energy and longing to be in front of an audience ended up seeping its way into the music because that was our only outlet."

**How did the music change as the sessions progressed?**
"A lot of this record is me writing about my personal journey, the unknown future, the doubts I had, some of the mistakes I made during the pandemic. There's so much I had to write for myself, to reintroduce who Lzzy Hale is to the Elizabeth on the inside. I got to know this Elizabeth character, I hadn't seen her in a while. So, it was a really strange, solitary journey for me."

**What do you mean by mistakes you made during the pandemic?**
"When I didn't have that outlet for music and I was missing the community of the live show, you realise you can't fill that hole with anything else. There was a period of time when we were all drinking too much or trying to fill the void with other things. When you're faced with this unknown future, you start digging a hole for yourself and going to a very dark place. I probably visited some places in my mind that I'd never really thought were there before. All I could do was throw myself into writing music and using it as a living, breathing diary."

**Is there a narrative of self-rediscovery running through this?**
"It's this beautiful rollercoaster ride; this reality of where my head was at, how deep I got down that rabbit hole and how I got myself out of it. And also a lot of hope, empowerment and encouragement. There are also a couple of songs on this record that were inspired directly by the conversations that I was having online with our fans and our freak family. It was the most wonderful group of people that would be tagging me every day being like, 'Liz, we're checking up on you too and if you need us we're here.' It made me very emotional."

**Since the release of your last album, 2018's *Vicious*, you celebrated the 10-year anniversary of your debut record [2009's *Halestorm*]. Did you revisit any of those songs for inspiration?**
"It's funny you say that. We didn't necessarily actively go back and try to recreate anything, but after we got it finished and we were listening to it, there definitely are a couple of nods to the beginning to both the first and second record, almost in an even more exciting way. What we've found is, I guess that we have a sound. It was a weird epiphany."

**Arejay (Hale, Lzzy's brother and Halestorm drummer) has talked about how big this record sounds. Would you say this is your heaviest record yet?**
"Because we weren't sure whether we would even be able to play these songs live, we just said we were going to go big or go home. The album is absolutely on 11 performance-wise, technicality-wise, sound-wise. It's very big, we don't half-ass anything. To add to what Arejay was saying, I think this is the most 'Halestorm' record yet. Instead of deciding to go left or right or experiment, we were more or less experimenting within our own power and what really makes Halestorm what it is."

**HALESTORM'S FIFTH ALBUM IS DUE OUT THIS SPRING VIA ATLANTIC**

### THE FACTS

**ALBUM:**
Five

**STUDIO:**
Rock Falcon, Nashville

**PRODUCERS:**
Nick Raskulinecz and Scott Stevens

**EXPECT:**
Halestorm's thunder rock... on steroids

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# Tony Martin

*Former Black Sabbath Vocalist*

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METAL HAMMER
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8/10

## Thorns

**Tony Martin** is an English heavy metal vocalist best known for his time fronting **BLACK SABBATH**, initially from 1987 to 1991 and again from 1993 to 1997. **Martin** was the band's second longest serving vocalist after Ozzy Osbourne. **Black Sabbath's ETERNAL IDOL** and **HEADLESS CROSS** are among the best known albums featuring **Tony Martin**,as well as **SCREAM**, his second solo album from 2005. The new album features **Danny Needham** (Venom), **Magnus Rosen** (HammerFall), **Scott McClellan**, who helped to co-write the album, **Greg Smith**, who performed with Alice Cooper, Rainbow, Blue Öyster Cult, **Dario Mollo** and many more!

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THE STORY BEHIND

# REFUSE/RESIST BY SEPULTURA

## It opened with the sound of a baby's heartbeat and closed with a 20-second roar of fury. In between, Sepultura delivered one of metal's greatest riot-starting calls-to-arms

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURE: PAUL NATKIN/GETTY

**IT WAS A** glimpse of a leather jacket on a New York subway that sparked the song that would turbocharge Sepultura's ascent from global ambassadors for Brazilian metal to one of the most important and influential bands of the 1990s.

"I was riding the subway in New York," says former Sepultura frontman Max Cavalera. "There was a kind of Black Panther, punk kind of guy, and he had a black leather jacket with a protest verse painted on it. At the very end of the verse, it said: 'Protest and survive/Refuse and resist.' I got out of the subway and went back to our hotel and wrote it down so I didn't forget it."

That moment of inspiration became the driving engine of *Refuse/Resist*, the opening track and second single from 1993's landmark *Chaos A.D.* album. This three-minute blast of noise and fury slowed down the bludgeoning barrage with which the band had made their name, helping propel these four feral 20-somethings from the sprawling city of Belo Horizonte firmly out of the underground metal ghetto and into the early 90s metal mainstream. Today, almost 30 years on, it still stands as one of the most recognisable calls-to-arms from that era or any other.

"At the time, we had a lot of anger, a lot of depression, the world was crazy," says Max. "That song definitely reflected what we were thinking."

Sepultura had served notice on their ambition a few years earlier. The primal death-thrash of 1989's *Beneath The Remains* – their third full-length album, but their first via Roadrunner, at the time an influential underground metal label rather than the powerhouse it became – caused waves among those plugged into that scene. The follow-up, 1991's *Arise*, came loaded with expectation, even if this exploding Molotov Cocktail of a record was still a little too ahead of the curve to be embraced by a world not yet quite primed for its relative extremity.

By 1993, the landscape was starting to shift. Death metal's initial bludgeoning impact may have waned, but it had left a hammerprint on the mainstream metal scene, warping the boundaries of what was acceptable in terms of sonic brutality in the process. More pertinently, the success of Pantera's game-changing *Vulgar Display Of Power* had recalibrated the dials, ushering in a bold new era for heavy music.

Sepultura themselves felt the change coming and were ready to meet it head on. "We were never satisfied with any of our albums," says Max. "We were always, like, 'OK, we're done with this one, what can we do next?' We were always looking for new stuff. We tried to reinvent ourselves as much as we could, which is a very hard thing to do sometimes."

They were certainly aiming high with the album that would become *Chaos A.D.*. Max and co's pool of influences had broadened way beyond thrash and death metal. Newer inspirations included everything from Ministry and rap-rock bruisers Biohazard to British post-punk firebrands New Model Army and even goth linchpins The Mission. "It was a transitional time for us," says Max. "We started listening to different bands that we were thinking we could get influences from and put into our stuff."

An even bigger marker of their ambitions came with the decision to enlist Andy Wallace as producer. Andy had worked with the likes of Slayer, Faith No More, White Zombie and Nirvana, as well as mixing *Arise*. He could heavy up alternative bands and make metal bands sound cutting edge.

"Andy actually came to [Sepultura's adopted hometown] Phoenix and hung out in our jam-pad for about three days, making notes of all the songs," says Max. "We never had anyone do that before: analyse the music, suggesting different things we could do."

Max already had the germ of the idea for *Refuse/Resist*, thanks to the leather-jacketed punk on the New York subway. It dovetailed perfectly with a grinding, groove-heavy riff that had been rattling around his head. "It reminded me of a riot," he says of the riff. "Cars burning and upside down, shit spread out all over the place, chaos everywhere. When I listen to it and close my eyes, I can see a riot even now. It's definitely an anti-police song."

That musical fury was reflected in a set of vivid lyrics that were partly inspired by some of the apocalyptic second-wave punk bands that Sepultura loved, such as Discharge and GBH. Max piled on images of tanks in streets, a population under siege from the authorities and mass disorder – part social commentary, part revolutionary rallying cry.

"We'd seen stuff happening all over the world, in Indonesia, in China, in Brazil, in America," he says. "We were travelling more and more and we were learning about all this fucking bullshit that is politics."

Ironically, Sepultura couldn't have been further away from the front line when they recorded *Chaos A.D.*. The band and Andy Wallace decamped to Rockfield in South Wales, the rural studios where Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin and Queen had recorded some of their most famous albums.

"We were hanging around the pubs in Monmouth and Chepstow, the same places where Geezer Butler and Robert Plant would have had a pint," says Max with a laugh. "We were definitely looking for that vibe. We were living beyond our dreams."

### THE FACTS

**RELEASED:**
1993

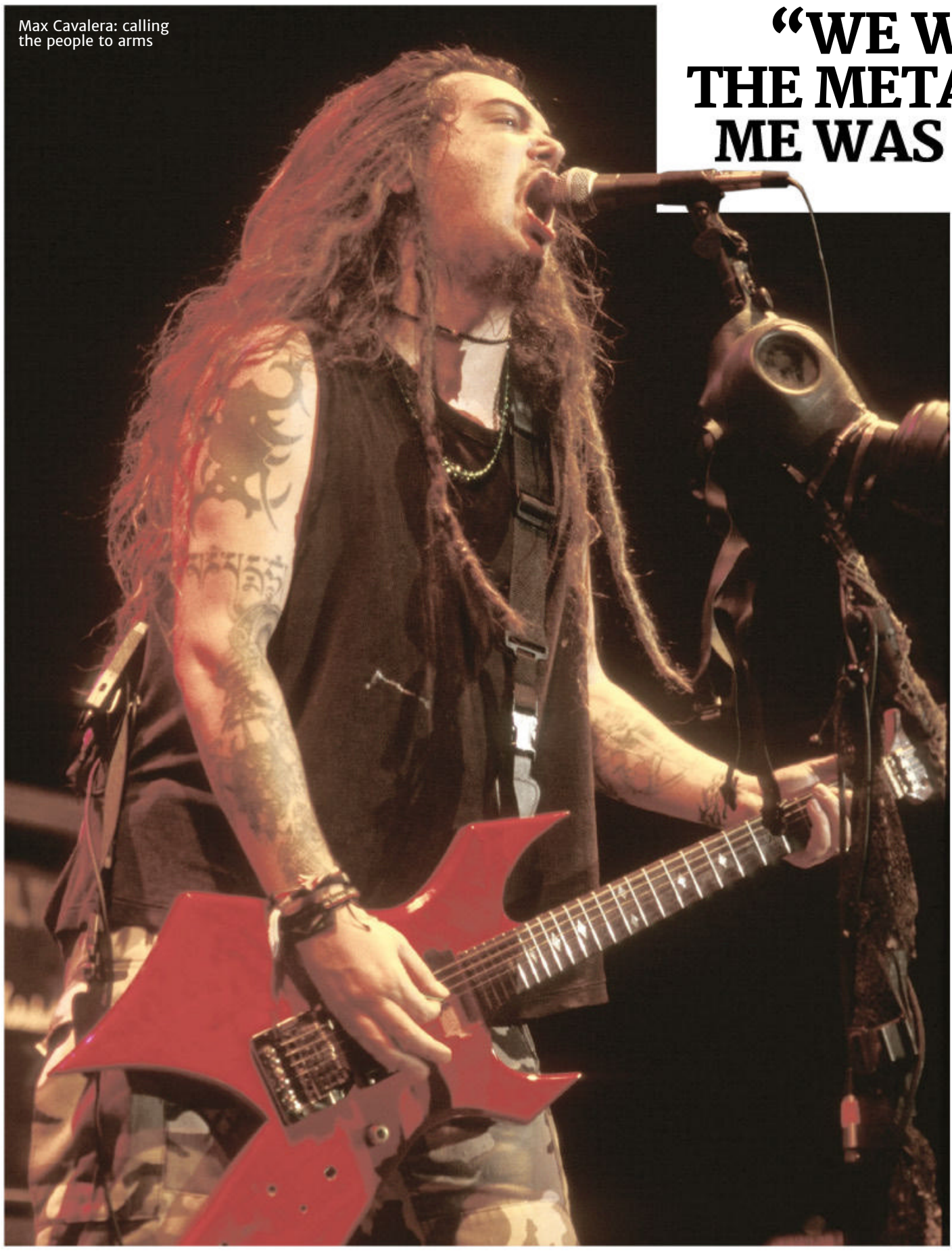
**ALBUM:**
*Chaos A.D.*

**PERSONNEL:**
Max Cavalera (vocals,rhythm guitar)
Iggor Cavalera (drums)
Paulo Jr (bass)
Andreas Kisser (lead guitar)

# “WE WERE LEARNING ABOUT ALL THIS BULLSHIT THAT IS POLITICS”

MAX CAVALERA

Sepultura (clockwise from top left): Max Cavalera, Paulo Jr, Andreas Kisser, Iggor Cavalera


Max Cavalera: calling the people to arms

# "WE WERE IN IT FOR THE METAL. MUSIC FOR ME WAS MY WEAPON"

**MAX CAVALERA**

Yet they still brought a little bit of Brazil with them to the valleys. Iggor Cavalera's opening drum salvo – played on a smaller, piccolo drum snare – foreshadowed the indigenous rhythms Sepultura would explore in more depth on follow-up album *Roots*.

"It was Andy who wanted to bring together Brazilian music and metal in a culture clash," says Max. "I wasn't sure they'd go together, I thought they were too far apart. But he said, 'No, you should go there.' He was right."

*Refuse/Resist* closed with Max's epic, 20-second roar of fury, but the song's opening was equally striking. It begins with an unearthly pulse – actually the sound of the heartbeat of Max and wife Gloria's unborn son, Zyon, captured during an ultrasound scan.

"I love that intro," says Max. "That was fun – I was right there in the clinic with a MiniDisc and headphones, trying to record the heartbeat sound with the nurses. It was important to get that right because it's such a unique intro."

In 2010, Max brought things full circle when his post-Sepultura band, Soulfly, recorded a cover of *Refuse/Resist* featuring a 17-year-old Zyon Cavalera on drums for a bonus track on the *Omen* album. "It was Zyon's choice to cover that song," says Max. "It was the perfect thing to do."

Sepultura's original version of *Refuse/Resist* was released in February 1994 as the second single from *Chaos A.D.*. In keeping with the track's lyrical theme, the single featured an image of a protester leaping at a line of police riot shields while fire burns in the street. The video went even further, incorporating footage of the unknown man who faced down a line of Chinese tanks during 1989's infamous Tiananmen Square uprising – one of the most famous images of protest in history.

Sepultura would have their own run-in with the authorities, albeit inadvertently. In 1994, the band appeared at a festival in São Paulo in Brazil. At the end of the set, as Max hoisted his 18-month-old son Zyon above his head, someone threw a Brazilian flag onstage. As they left the stage, Max was bundled into the back of a van and driven to a nearby police station, where he was informed that he had been arrested for urinating on the national flag (he hadn't and was eventually released without charge, though his alleged actions prompted a national outcry).

*Chaos A.D.* had already kicked Sepultura to the next level, giving them their first US Top 40 album and reaching No.11 in the UK charts when it was released in September 1993. *Refuse/Resist*, with its roar of defiance, consolidated their status as one of the most vital metal bands of the decade, even if things were subtly beginning to change within the band.

"When we lived in Belo Horizonte, we were a full-on gang," says Max. "We were together 24 hours a day. We even went to jail together. By the time of *Chaos A.D.*, it was not so much like a gang, it was more like a regular band. People were having relationships and other things. It was different."

Sepultura would make one more album with Max, 1995's *Roots*, before the singer left acrimoniously the following year. Today, *Refuse/Resist* remains the band's most enduring riot-starting anthem, and one of their most successful.

"I've never really paid much attention to that stuff," says Max. "The word 'success' doesn't mean much to me. It's like the Grammys – they're like haemorrhoids, 'cos eventually every asshole gets one. I never got into music for that. We were in it for the metal and what it represented. Music for me was my weapon, and in Sepultura it was my weapon big time."

JOHN ATASHIAN/GETTY

# THURSDAYS JUST GOT HEAVIER

METAL HAMMER PODCAST

SEARCH ‘METAL HAMMER PODCAST’ ON APPLE, SPOTIFY OR WHEREVER YOU GET YOUR PODCASTS

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YOUR SHOUT

# WHAT ARE YOU LOT LISTENING TO OVER THERE?

Maiden: Close but no cigar

## And other reckless insults, enquiring probes and hearty high fives you lot sent our way this month

### LIST BUMP

I presumed Iron Maiden would just walk the Critics' Poll [issue #356] with *Senjutsu* as they always do when they release an album, so I was pleasantly surprised to find two brilliant, modern metal bands in Gojira and Trivium grab the No.1 and No.2 spots. Good job, you *Metal Hammer* writers.
*George Astrella (email)*

**While *Senjutsu* missing out on top spot this year left some *Hammer* writers sobbing into their katanas, this year's top 50 was of such high quality across the board that we don't think anyone can get too grumpy. Plus, Gojira rule. As do Trivium. And Maiden. And Employed To S–ah, you get the picture.**

### LIST SLUMP

Exodus put out their best album for years and it doesn't even make your writers' end of year list? What are you lot listening to over there?
*David Brown (Facebook)*

**Not enough thrash, apparently! What can we say? It was an unbelievable year and some bands just had to miss out. Just ask Merl and El about Tetrarch's omission meaning nu metal didn't get a look in this year…**

### LIST JUMP

Thought the Critics' Poll was pretty spot-on this year, even if I'd have jumped Mastodon up a couple of spots. There is no way that album isn't a top-five level in any self-respecting metal fan's list!
*Jamey Wilson (Facebook)*

**We can't help but wonder if Mastodon may have snuck a place or two higher if people had had more time to digest the incredible *Hushed And Grim* before handing their lists in, but then how do you demote Employed To Serve or Spiritbox? Or Iron Maiden? Or Triv–oh god, we're doing it again.**

### NU YEAR, NU ME

Haters gonna hate but I am living for nu metal being back. New Limp Bizkit and Korn albums, Mudvayne coming back, Slipknot getting new masks… it's like 2001 all over again and I'm loving it!
*Kat Harding (Facebook)*

**We've already referenced nu metal once on this month's Your Shout so you can probably guess our feelings on this *jingles wallet chain helpfully*.**

### PARKWAY LIVE

I was supposed to see my first Parkway show in 2020, then 2021. Now it's postponed again to 2022 and I'm starting to feel like it's cursed. Will I ever get to see my favourite band?!
*Jessica Pearce (Facebook)*

**Patience is a virtue, Jessica. As is not having a choice because, you know, pandemics and all**

Exodus: sorry, guys. We failed you

### #TWEETS

You know the way everyone pretended they hated Limp Bizkit for ages and then in the past few years there's been a resurgence and everyone's admitted they're actually sick? Yeah that's gonna happen with Nickelback in the next year and a half.
**Milkie Way, Wargasm (@milkieway_)**

I think I'm learning that I'm a healthy balance of "speak your mind" with "shut yo dumb ass up"
**Jason Aaalon Butler, Fever 333 (@mrjasonaalon)**

Whether you perform at a dive bar or a stadium for $50 or $5,0000 - you ALWAYS give 100% NO MATTER WHAT
**Alicia Taylor, Cherry Bombs (@AliciaETaylor)**

Help I sprained my beehive last night can anyone recommend rehabilitation exercises?
**Alexandra James, Twin Temple (@TwinTemple)**

MAIDEN: JOHN MCMURTRIE/PRESS INSETS: PRESS

Code Orange: set to own 2022?

**of that. And trust us: you couldn't have chosen a better era to see Parkway Drive for the first time. Those European shows are going to be insane!**

## THANK (METAL) GOD

Rob Halford is such a national treasure. As if his legacy wasn't enough, he battles cancer in private and then uses the experience to spread the word about getting yourself checked out. Legend. Thank the Metal Gods for Rob!
*Lewis Davies (email)*

**There's only one Rob Halford. And the Metal God is quite right – fellas, go for that GP visit, get that prostate checked, do the thing. And then listen to Judas Fucking Priest**

## BRING ME THE COCKTAIL

Bring Me The Horizon are doing 'festival experiences' now? Sorry, but any festival that isn't having me face-down in mud, off my face with rain pissing down my neck isn't a real festival. Let's not forget what true rock'n'roll is all about!
*Charles Lewis (Facebook)*

**Hey, we love a muddy mosh as much as the next heavy metal magazine, but honestly? Sunshine, music, the beach and cocktails within arm's reach? Maybe we're getting old, but that doesn't sound too shabby to us.**

## CODE RED

There aren't nearly enough people talking about Code Orange right now. They owned 2020 and managed to put out the best metal song of 2021 right at the very end with *Out For Blood*. Mark my words, they'll own 2022 too.
*Hannah Thomson (Facebook)*

**We think Code Orange would be the first to agree with you there – they've rarely been the shyest at begging themselves up. And with tunes like *Out For Blood* in their back pocket, who are we to argue?!**

## GETTING GIGGY WITH IT

Is anyone else getting pure anxiety from the number of gigs they have to plan in over the coming year? There's too many! I never thought I'd say that!
*Manesh Patel (Facebook)*

**It's all got a bit overwhelming, but you know what? We're ready. Bring on 2022. We'll see you in the pit.***

***With a beer at the bar, politely nodding, because we're old.**



# THE BIG DEBATE

**In issue 355, our interview with legendary producer Bob Rock revealed some fascinating insights into his relationship with Metallica. It seems there were some mixed opinions about his legacy with the band, however.**

## HE SAID

"Metallica didn't trust outsiders. Not just me, they were suspicious of everybody. I can say that I'd never been involved with people who were as intense as them."

## YOU SAY

Bob Rock ruined Metallica. Before that, they were the best thrash band in the world, after, they became another soft arena rock band for soccer moms and kids.
*Jay Perowne (Facebook)*

*The Black Album* will never be my favourite but thrash hasn't evolved since the 80s and Metallica are doing stadiums. They made the right choice for their career.
*James Owens (Facebook)*

*The Black Album* is amazing. If they hadn't have written that record they'd be stuck in venues a 10th of the size of what they do now, putting out increasingly shitty versions of *Creeping Death*. Facts.
*Ricky Asadi (Facebook)*

I clocked out of Metallica after *The Black Album*. People can live in denial all they want but everything they've done since doesn't hold a candle to the first four records.
*Daniel Warner (Facebook)*

Whatever you think of the music, *The Black Album* redefined metal production. Bob Rock is a genius for what he did. The fact that those songs still sound like they could have been made a week ago says it all.
*Kyle Nash (Facebook)*

**JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS**

# HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

**ZEAL & ARDOR**
*Zeal & Ardor*
"One of the most vibrant voices in metal has just taken the next step up"
**MERLIN ALDERSLADE**
EDITOR

**ZEAL & ARDOR**
*Zeal & Ardor*
"Manuel Gagneux realises his concept in spectacular style"
**ELEANOR GOODMAN**
DEPUTY EDITOR

**40 WATT SUN**
*Perfect Light*
"A record to stop time and mend hearts from the most sublime of voices"
**JONATHAN SELZER**
REVIEWS EDITOR

**40 WATT SUN**
*Perfect Light*
"Beautiful, haunting melodies. Blissful music to melt away to"
**VANESSA THORPE**
PRODUCTION EDITOR

**BIFFY CLYRO**
*The Myth Of The Happily Ever After*
"Not a metal album but I just cannot get enough"
**LOUISE BROCK**
ART EDITOR

**VOIVOD**
*Synchro Anarchy*
"Prog metal OGs as ahead of the curve as ever"
**DAVE EVERLEY**
FREELANCE NEWS EDITOR

NEW NOISE

# ONCE HUMAN

## Worlds collide as ex-Machine Head guitarist Logan Mader returns to the fray

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

**PICTURE THE SCENE:** an eager-eyed young greenhorn approaches a grizzled, retired veteran for advice on how to take on the world, and before they know it, the vet is gearing up to join them and take one last shot at glory. It's the overarching narrative for a million Hollywood movies, but also how Australian singer Lauren Hart ended up forming Once Human with ex-Machine Head and Soulfly guitarist Logan Mader in 2014.

He might not have quite been Old Man Logan when Once Human formed, but at that point Logan had spent 15 years away from the stage, working in production, collaborating with everyone from Five Finger Death Punch on their debut album to Gojira for *The Way Of All Flesh*. Approached by former Roadrunner and current Nuclear Blast A&R legend Monte Conner to work with an up-and-coming singer, Logan soon found himself pulled away from the comforts of the mixing desk.

"I'd sit in with a singer, work on some demos and maybe help them shop it around," Logan says. "But when I met Lauren, we hit it off right away and there was some good creative chemistry and pretty soon I realised that I really missed playing in a band."

"He re-attached his dreadlocks for me!" Lauren adds with a smile.

"I did! I wasn't stage-ready at the time; I was a *dad*, you know? I'd cut my dreads off when I stopped touring but never got rid of them. I sealed them up in a bag and put them in my garage for some reason. So when Once Human evolved beyond being just a studio project, I got them woven back into my short hair so I could headbang again, at least until my hair grew back out."

While Logan's past in groove metal titans like Machine Head and Soulfly was apparent in the sound of Once Human, the band augmented it with elements of melodeath to forge a sonic identity of their own. Early tours with bands like Fear Factory and Dragonforce helped them establish a global fanbase ("Talk about being thrown in at the deep end!" Lauren jokes), but throughout it all the band still strived for more, hoping to truly find their voice. With their third album, *Scar Weaver*, they think they might have done just that.

"Once Human are still a young band and we sort of work as a human does," Lauren explains. "We've grown past the awkward teenage years of trying to discover who we are and what we're about."

"*Scar Weaver* is Once Human's potential fully realised," Logan says confidently. "Lauren has reached an apex as a vocalist and that's really summed up on this album."

**IN SHORT**

**SOUNDS LIKE:** Arena-conquering groove metal being jettisoned into the cosmos via Strapping Young Lad and Gojira

**FOR FANS OF:** Machine Head, Jinjer, Strapping Young Lad

**LISTEN TO:** *Cold Arrival*

**EVEN AT A** cursory glance, *Scar Weaver* does feel like a whole new beast for Once Human. While the mixture of melodeath and groove metal is still prevalent, there is an inclusion of progressive and tech metal elements that has allowed the band to build ever-grander and more impressive sonic structures. Guitarist Max Karon wrote the majority of the album's instrumentals, allowing the other members a chance to flex their own talents.

For Logan, this was production work that could truly capture not only the live spirit of the band, but the sheer technical prowess of their playing. For Lauren, this meant refining and reworking her lyrics and vocal melodies – though it proved to be something of both a blessing and a curse.

PRESS

Once Human: good enough to drag Logan Mader out of band retirement

"The extra time we got with the album [because of the pandemic] wasn't great for a perfectionist like me because I'm writing and rewriting everything again and again," she admits. "I work the best under deadlines. It didn't help that I was struggling a lot creatively during the pandemic. The last album [2017's *Evolution*], I love the fact that it was a really triumphant feeling in the vocal melodies and the lyrics. I really tried to make *Scar Weaver* the same because I like when people listen to music and it makes them feel good and empowered, but this time it was a lot more dire. I just couldn't fake it."

Disappointed as Lauren might be in the album's comparative lack of PMA, *Scar Weaver* feels all the more poignant for its lyrical honesty, addressing tough subjects like grief and emotional distress head-on. The song *Cold Arrival* deals with the sudden death of a close friend, while *Deadlock* sees the band contending with the perils of modern life, ranging from social media to political divisions. It also allowed Logan to his past and present lives,

**"I GOT MY DREADS WOVEN BACK INTO MY SHORT HAIR SO I COULD HEADBANG AGAIN"**

**LOGAN MADER**

when Machine Head frontman Robb Flynn agreed to guest on the song. The pair had long since reconciled following Logan's departure from that band in 1996, but Robb's appearance still came as a surprise.

"You don't see Robb appearing on many other people's songs, so I was really happy when he said yes," Logan says. "He got really involved creatively – he took the reins and changed the arrangements around and we really liked how it came out."

But what about Lauren – was it a challenge handing over the spotlight? "Oh no, I *love* Robb!" she enthuses. "I really look up to him, so I was completely honoured. He joined us in San Francisco on this tour to play it live, so I got to be onstage with him and that was *insanely* fun. Singing *Davidian* with Robb Flynn is something I will remember for the rest of my life."

***SCAR WEAVER* IS DUE OUT FEBRUARY 11 VIA EARMUSIC**

## NEW NOISE

# DOODSWENS

### The emerging face of 21st-century black metal journeys through the darkness and light

WORDS: CHRISTINA WENIG • PICTURE: DOLPH CANTRIJN

**THE HISTORY OF** Doodswens was written onstage. The Dutch duo played their first gigs without having recorded a single song and quickly built a reputation based on their live performances. "We just started jamming and people caught on to that. We got our first gig, then the band name and then we created our set," drummer Inge van der Zon remembers.

That set would turn into the band's first demo in early 2019 and lead to appearances at prestigious metal events like Roadburn Festival and tours alongside the likes of Marduk. It has taken almost three more years for Doodswens to release their first album, *Lichtvrees*, a vicious yet atmospheric gem that is inspired by the Second Wave of Black Metal as well as a blooming Dutch underground scene.

"I wouldn't change a thing about our demo because it was raw and pure, the full force of energy that we evoked at that time," singer and guitarist Fraukje van Burg states, "but we matured and so the music is changing, too. We had more time to develop this sound and put more thought into this album. It definitely has a deeper meaning."

Though ritualism plays an important role in the band's stage and video performances, their lyrical content is rooted in their emotional journeys. *Lichtvrees* ("fear of light") moves through different stages of darkness and light, highs and lows, to come to a universal conclusion, as van Burg explains: "You learn to accept the light but also the fact that darkness can always return. This way, you can reach some form of enlightenment, some peace of mind."

In these uncertain times, Doodswens can only hope to spread this message live as soon as possible. But one thing is for sure: It will always be the two of them. "We don't want to sound like a five-person band," says Inge. 'This is the essence of two people." MH

**IN SHORT**

**SOUNDS LIKE:**
A dark entity summoning the spirits of old-school black metal

**FOR FANS OF:**
Darkthrone, Enthroned, Wiegedood

**LISTEN TO:**
*In Mijn Bloed*

***LICHTVREES* IS OUT NOW VIA SVART RECORDS**

# EIGHT BELLS

### Porland's post-everything mavericks serve up the perfect soundtrack for the endtimes

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURE: CODY KETO

**WHILE APOCALYPTIC THEMES** have long been a source of inspiration for metal bands, they seemed rather too close for comfort when it came to birthing genre-splicing prog-metallers Eight Bells' third album, the majestic *Legacy Of Ruin*.

"It was a tremendous effort," admits vocalist/guitarist/mastermind Melynda Jackson. "All the pain and angst around our hopeless failing state, the cruelty of Americans, shelter in place orders, Oregon catching on fire, threats of evacuations, heatwaves, drought, rolling power outages and the outbreak of a pandemic… It was like the closer we got to finishing this album, the more we were seeing its content playing out around us."

The recording presented physical challenges alongside psychic ones, thanks to wildfires tearing across their home state of Oregon. "Portland had the worst air quality on the planet for about a week," says bassist Matt Solis. "That was right when Melynda and I had to record our vocals. Thankfully, we were able to work through it without destroying our health."

Multi-layered and dense with intertwining ideas, the band's ambitious mix of sounds, styles and timbres – from crushingly heavy to rapturously elegiac – is matched by the thinking that informs it. One overarching theme, however, is how human greed and ignorance are leading to global destruction. "The album is basically about the bittersweet feeling of being alive on this planet," suggests Matt.

But while there is much rage and sorrow, there are also fragile threads of hope. "Hope doesn't always mean happiness," says Melynda. "It often means disappointment. To me, hope seems like a small thing – a reason to struggle against obstacles. Do I have hope for humans in an overall sense? Not really, but it does exist in the smiles of people I love. That's what keeps me alive." MH

**IN SHORT**

**SOUNDS LIKE:**
The end of the world by way of sludge, prog and black metal, all wrapped in glorious vocal harmonies

**FOR FANS OF:**
Altar Of Plagues, Asunder, Neurosis

**LISTEN TO:**
*The Crone*

***LEGACY OF RUIN* IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 25 VIA PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS**

# FRONTIERER

## That twisted DIY mathcore/ electronic explosion you ordered has arrived

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

**IN SHORT**

**SOUNDS LIKE:**
Demented, dystopian and very, very noisy math-metal

**FOR FANS OF:**
Pupil Slicer, Ion Dissonance, Code Orange

**LISTEN TO:**
*Glacial Plasma*

**A WILD AND** unhinged amalgam of thuggish mathcore, explosive electronics and bug-eyed, glitchy noise, Frontierer's music is obnoxiously thrilling and genuinely terrifying. As showcased on latest album *Oxidized*, the Scottish crew's insane hybrid is the perfect, bewildering onslaught for these bizarre times.

"It's the sound of all of our favourite artists, deconstructed, welded together and put back together again," says guitarist and band founder Pedram Valiani. "It's sonic terror! But being extreme isn't just about cramming in notes-per-bar or having a harsh sound palette, it's about being beyond the edge of what went before."

Formed in 2012, Frontierer have steadily built up a rabid online following. The vinyl version of *Oxidized* sold out within a matter of hours, and the band scored more than a million streams on Spotify during 2021. Still operating largely under the mainstream radar, Frontierer have pursued a resolutely DIY course.

"It's all been word of mouth, with no PR machine beyond my own personal strategy and vision," says Pedram. "Engaging with our fans directly is the key to retaining their interest and dedication. We have some very hardcore fans who we love very much."

Armed with some of the most twisted heavy music currently available, Frontierer have big plans for the future. It's time to get onboard or get crushed.

"If we could actually play a show in the next year that'd be pretty sweet!" laughs Pedram. "There are a few favourite festivals we'd love to play. We'd love to support our favourite bands and do a few bucket list collaborations. There's a *lot* in the pipeline."

***OXIDIZED* IS OUT NOW VIA BANDCAMP**

# DUST MOUNTAIN

## Takes from the ancient earth courtesy of folk-horror adjacent Finns

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER

**IN SHORT**

**SOUND LIKE:**
Psychedelic folk from a village haunting your dreams

**FOR FANS OF:**
Hexvessel, Purson, Blood Ceremony

**LISTEN TO:**
*Village On Fire*

**CREATED GRADUALLY OVER** five years, Dust Mountain's debut album, *Hymns For Wilderness*, weaves its pagan folk reveries from the most ancient yet enduring of strands. The ensemble, drawn from the fertile Finnish scene of Oranssi Pazuzu, Hexvessel and more, tap into the darkness-lurking-within-the-idyllic vibe that's driven the resurgence of folk horror. But despite their tales of burning villages and equinox rites, the band are not pandering to common perceptions.

"I liked the aesthetics of *The Wicker Man* and *Midsommar*," says frontwoman Henna Hietamäki, "but connecting pagan rituals to gruesome barbarism continues the myth created by the conquerors, who've been more violent than the pagans they converted."

*Hymns...* roams free between the realms of the earthly and the uncanny, as much a state of mind as it is a testimony to their environment.

"With this band it's easy to get to this sensuous, mystic mindset," says Henna. "It comes down to quieting the neurotic ego, diving deeper to the experience of existence. The purpose is to be an open vessel, to help people process emotions, often unconscious and wordless."

***HYMNS FOR WILDERNESS* IS OUT NOW VIA SVART RECORDS**

PRESS

## IN THE KNOW

### What your favourite bands are listening to

# TALLAH

**"WE ARE ALL** really into Tallah. They are totally doing their own thing and don't play by the normal industry rules. That suits us great, because Jinjer love bands that say, 'Fuck the rules!'"

TATIANA SHMAYLUK, JINJER

# HOARD ALMIGHTY

## Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

# CULT OF LUNA

## *THE LONG ROAD NORTH: VINYL BOX*

METAL BLADE

**£49.99**

**EAGER TO SNAFFLE** every last crumb from 2019's *A Dawn to Fear,* Cult Of Luna built on those recording sessions for album number eight, *The Long Road North*. Clocking in at 69 minutes across nine songs, it's a gloriously lush, unsettling epic. Boasting contributions from Colin Stetson, the bloke who gave you the willies with his OST for *Hereditary*, and vocals from experimental pop singer Mariam Wallentin, it's an eclectic aural tapestry that deserves an equally dense physical counterpart. Which it *does* have, would you believe it? Limited to 2,000 copies worldwide, this box set features the record on clear double vinyl, alongside a ye olde-style booklet, slipmat, patch and four exclusive art prints. Make space in your 2022 Album Of The Year slots and saddle up for more beautiful Swedish misery.

**tinyurl.com/luna-boxset**

### COMEBACK KID T-SHIRT

**£17.99**

*Heavy Steps* marks 20 years and seven albums for Winnipeg's all-conquering hardcore mob – no mean feat considering they began as a knockabout side-project. Like the band, this t-shirt is bold, in-your-face and kicks ass.

**tinyurl.com/comeback-tee**

### SILENCER BOX SET

**£73**

*Death – Pierce Me* is a cornerstone of the DSBM subgenre. On its 20th anniversary, Silencer's sole album gets all deluxe-like: foil-embossed box, backpatch, flag, 48-page booklet, plus the album with demos on CD and silver vinyl.

**tinyurl.com/silencer-box**

### GWAR HALFPINT FIGURES

**£14.30 - £34**

Intergalactic metal spunklords GWAR have their very own figurines, thanks to the folks at Knuckleheadz. Choose Jizmak Da Gusha, Beefcake the Mighty, Berserker Blothar, or all three. Maybe wipe them down first.

**tinyurl.com/gwar-halfpints**

## AMON AMARTH LEATHER JACKET

**£212.99-£230.99**

Their albums drip Viking mythology, but when it comes to sensible winterwear the melodeath institution have ditched scratchy tunics for this modern, logo-emblazoned jacket hewn from ultra-plush lamb's leather.

**tinyurl.com/amon-leather**

## TONY IOMMI PERFUME

**£201/£471**

What odours would evoke the late-60s rock scene that birthed Black Sabbath? Thankfully Xerjoff decided it was leather, patchouli, cinnamon and more on this collaboration with Toni Iommi for his signature perfumes.

**tinyurl.com/iommi-xerjoff**

## TARJA AUTOBIOGRAPHY

**£35/£130**

This photo-packed tome explores Tarja's extraordinary career from singing in church halls to world domination. If you're a moneybags, plump for the signed, slipcased edition, which comes with two art prints.

**tarjabook.com**

## NEGURĂ BUNGET ARTBOOK EDITION

**£33.50**

These BM legends had their career cut tragically short, but they left us with the posthumous *Zău*. This edition features a 36-page book, expanded artwork, a DVD and an essay by *Hammer*'s own Jonathan Selzer.

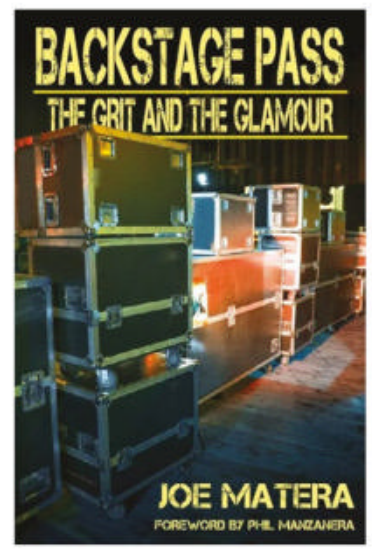
**tinyurl.com/zau-artbook**

## BLACK METAL COFFEE BUNDLE

**£17.99**

The strongest ov kvffees… with a nutty, chocolate kick. These 100% Arabica beans were hand-roasted while exposed to 666 minutes of black metal (seriously). Mug's decent, too.

**tinyurl.com/worship-coffee**




## BACKSTAGE PASS BOOK

**£13**

Joe Matera has gigged internationally and interviewed everyone from Metallica and Motörhead to Entombed and, err, Nickelback. This warts'n'all book spotlights the less glam side of the biz – be you a scribe or a muso.

**tinyurl.com/bstage-pass**

## DOOM METAL LEXICANUM 2

**£30-£35**

Aleksey Evdokimov's original book was an essential guide to things that go 'DUUUURN'. Its 300-plus page follow-up mainly focuses on death-doom, dissecting the likes of My Dying Bride, Paradise Lost, Sevenchurch and more.

**tinyurl.com/doom-ii**

## BLOOD YOUTH IPA

**£6.10**

Yeah, a tropical 9% IPA from Blood Youth wasn't on our 2021 bingo card either. Regardless, it's been created with award-winning brewery Northern Monk; given it's the blackest IPA they've ever brewed, we're keen.

**tinyurl.com/bloody-beer**

## KILLSTAR BACKPACK

**£42**

The perfect backpack for storing grimoires, potions and miscellaneous magickal stuff. In case your furry familiar's worried, it's faux leather; in case *you're* worried, it's peppered with silver crosses to fend off vampyrs.

**tinyurl.com/creature-back**

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THE NEW HEAVY 2022

# Out of the Blue

**Spiritbox's rise has been nothing less than meteoric. And yet, as a new year beckons, they assure us they're just getting started**

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: JONATHAN WEINER

Courtney has come a long way from her church band days

# “I FEEL LIKE I’M THE REAL ME NOW”

COURTNEY LAPLANTE

Courtney LaPlante didn't feel like the *real* Courtney LaPlante until February 2020. It was Spiritbox's first tour, in Europe, far from their home in Canada. She was no longer striving for academic achievements, she was no longer singing someone else's songs, and she was no longer 'office job Courtney' working alongside indifferent colleagues – she was finally expressing herself authentically, to fans that connected with her music.

"It was physically seeing the people that support and care about us, and then seeing the response and getting confirmation that I'm not crazy – there is something special here," she says of the moment that changed her. "I'm *not* crazy. We're not crazy. This is special."

But as Courtney was riding high on those feelings, Covid put an end to the tour, sending her into a panic. She had finally found what she'd been looking for, and now it was going to be cruelly snatched away?

"When everything came crashing down, I was like, 'God, it's over,'" she recalls. "I felt this momentum building, I felt it in the air, and it's gone." She pauses. "Then it kept going!"

Their single *Holy Roller* broke the internet, and they went on tour with Limp Bizkit. Last year's stunning debut album, *Eternal Blue*, was a masterful synthesis of tech metal, nu metal, metalcore and alternative, brought to life by Courtney's sweet and savage voice. It reached the Top 20 in the US and the UK, and No.5 in *Metal Hammer*'s critics' poll – remarkable achievements for a new band. "I always joke about there being a glitch in the Matrix," laughs Mike Stringer, guitarist and Courtney's husband, of the hype they've unleashed.

For Courtney, who has long had depression and manages it with medication and the help of her support network, it's like a big piece of the puzzle has fallen into place. "Of course I still have bad days, but I feel like I'm the real me now, and I don't have to repress that part of me that wants to always express themselves creatively, and I feel understood by the people I'm spending my time with," she smiles. "It's great!"

Today the pair are talking to us via Zoom. Courtney is warm and lively with a deadpan sense of humour. Mike is protective, putting an arm around her when we ask personal questions, and backing up her answers. They frequently talk over each other, predicting each other's sentences or helping to fill in the words.

They are currently visiting Courtney's dad in Alabama en route to Florida's Welcome To Rockville festival, and she is thrilled. She left the US for Vancouver Island, Canada, with her mum and four brothers when she was 15, following her parents' divorce, and felt the distance keenly. Since being in touring bands, she's been able to go back more often.

"I'm finally at the point now where I don't lose my mind and sob on the ground every time I leave my dad," she says.

When she was growing up, her dad was a college basketball coach, so the family often moved if he got a good opening. Her mum was a teacher, and Courtney transferred schools whenever she moved jobs. But no matter where she went, her attitude was the same: to collect as many achievements as possible for her college application. "I was like a fake, Type A child," she explains. "I wanted to be that, but I wasn't."

That didn't stop her trying. She joined each cheerleading squad, and even became President of the Future Farmers Of America club. "Do you think I gave a *shit* about being a future farmer of America? No. But I knew that I could be its President. And I wanted that on my résumé."

As Alabama was in the Bible Belt, going to church was a given, so Courtney didn't question it, and even sang in a church band. It may have been a conservative upbringing, but it was all she knew, and the move to Canada was devastating. Transplanted into a new country with no friends, at first she only had her CDs for company: Kanye West's *The College Dropout*, Coldplay's *A Rush Of Blood To The Head*, John Mayer's *Continuum* and Foo Fighters' *The Colour And The Shape*. Later, she'd get into nu metal and classic rock.

"I was a sad kid, but I was good at pretending *not* to be a sad kid. That's how I squeaked through the cracks, and flew under the radar of what I really needed, which was probably a fuck-ton of therapy," she says. "That's why I felt like a magnet drawn to music, because when I moved here, that's all I had."

She stopped caring about school, but soon found that her new friends weren't that fussed either. They were ambitious, sure, but happy enough to figure their lives out along the way, rather than trying to guarantee a specific future.

"That made a really big impression on me," she says. "Then I went from a school that was very small to a school that was very big, and I was no longer the smartest or funniest or best athlete or any of that. I felt very free in being average; there was no pressure anymore. I could simply be a kid and hang out with my friends, and actually figure out what I like doing."

What Courtney liked doing was playing the guitar, piano and singing, and she formed the band Unicron with her high-school boyfriend and her eldest brother, Jackson. Their first gig was a battle of the bands in 2007 when she was 18. "We had a friend's wedding that day, but we were so determined, we left the wedding early!" she laughs. They didn't win.

At this point she was still going to church, but when she saw Mike's band, Fall In Archaea, she had an epiphany: "That's when it hit me that I was really just looking for a community of people that shared the same interests as me, not specifically that I wanted to go to church," she says. "So I found that scene, and I desperately wanted to be part of it."

Courtney's big break came in 2012 when the manager of Iwrestledabearonce contacted her on Messenger. Their singer, Krysta Cameron, was leaving the Warped Tour. Courtney was asked to replace her… and to do so immediately.

She quit her job at a yoga clothing store on the spot, and barely had time to pack her bags and say goodbye to Mike – by then they were together – before she boarded a plane at 5am the next day. It had been six months since she'd played live, she'd never practised with the band, and she didn't know all the lyrics – but she wasn't about to let that stop her.

"You know the Dunning-Kruger effect? When someone is so self-assured that they can't see their own faults? I was the epitome of that guy. Like, 'I can do this, and I'm gonna go up there and sing to these thousands of people who don't know that the singer has quit, and they're gonna be really upset.'"

The Youtube comments on the show footage were brutal: Courtney sucked.

Today Mike leaps to her defence, saying that IWABO hadn't adequately explained the situation to their fans. "Courtney was set up for failure," he says. "They put out a press release basically saying, 'Our vocalist is stepping down for the time being, but don't worry, our *good friend Courtney* is coming out, she has it all down, she's gonna kill it. Come out and support us.' The truth of the matter is, though, they had never met."

"I did suck," Courtney says. "[But] I feel like I should have been *allowed* the sucking a bit more."

Still, she followed up Warped Tour with a world tour, and forged a career with IWABO. Mike unofficially joined them as a guitarist in 2013. But life in the band began to steadily decline, offering diminishing financial and creative rewards. They decided to call it quits while on tour in Connecticut.

"That decision was not taken lightly," says Mike, "and it's one of the hardest things we've ever had to do. "You go from being in a band that tours, and you have that fulfilment, to then real life, where you don't have anything, and you won't have anything for many years – *if* you're lucky enough to get to that point. You have to get real jobs, and experience the

real world, which I'm very grateful *now* that I did. But that was a very difficult transition."

Courtney reflects on IWABO as a learning experience, but is relieved she's no longer the "eternal stepmom". Even after she'd established herself, people would yell, 'Where's Krysta?' and 'Krysta's better!' while she was singing.

"I never, ever once had an ego in that band. I never had a *chance* to become egotistical, because I was told constantly by their fans that I was shit," she says. "It pummelled my self-confidence. I think anyone who's a replacement singer goes through that. To have that lifted off me was amazing."

Back in Canada, they got jobs and set to work on new music, but weren't sure which direction to go in. "I was like, 'I'm not gonna *care* about defining the genre this is gonna be; I'm gonna write music that I enjoy and hopefully Courtney enjoys it,'" Mike recalls. With zero label interest, they put out Spiritbox's first EP independently in 2017.

Now they're in the strange position of having found success during a time of isolation, with streaming numbers and Likes the biggest indicators of their newfound fame. As well as bringing in bassist Bill Crook in 2018, they're now excited to have drummer Zev Rose in the ranks, but are under pressure to live up to people's expectations IRL.

"It's weird to go from a smaller project that's struggling, to the world shutting down, then that project sky-rocketing to a certain degree, and then coming out of it, and everyone just thinks that within a year of you not playing, you're gonna be perfect live," says Mike. So mentally, it's a struggle."

Courtney confesses that when she's asked about the festivals they're playing, she replies that she's "shitting her pants", but has been heartened to see other musicians backstage who are also nervous after their enforced break.

Meanwhile, signs of their rising status are cropping up. When they went to Knotfest in LA as punters, Cherry Bombs – the dance troupe led by Corey Taylor's wife, Alicia Dove – came out to *Holy Roller*. "We were screaming!" exclaims Mike.

"Then Alicia came out after, to hype everyone up," says Courtney. "Like [adopts a low growl], 'Alright, motherfuckers, are you ready for Bring Me The Horizon?' I was like, 'She needs to be a fucking vocalist… She can take over Spiritbox!'"

Building up other women is something Courtney excels at. She hosts a podcast series called *Good For A Girl*, where she interviews female musicians and industry figures about the challenges they face, and feels there's still a glass ceiling – although she's getting closer to it.

"What I love most about this, is I wanna keep soaring, and then all the pieces-of-shit guys who are using their stardom and their influence to *harm* other people? Every time one of them gets got, I'm like, 'Alright, there's more room on the bill now! Put that name up, take those other ones down!'"

The band's sights are set on the future, and Mike says their biggest hurdle will be following up *Eternal Blue*. By the time you read this, they will have started writing new material with producer/mixer/co-conspirator Dan Braunstein. "I'm nervous about it, but I think getting in there and starting is gonna be such a relieving experience," says Mike.

There's a steely determination in the way the couple talk. For all the happiness they're experiencing, they're aware that rapid success can be fleeting, and after years of solid graft, they're not about to let this chance slip through their fingers.

"We've never gotten to a point where we felt like that dangling carrot is really close," says Mike. "And now, it seems like, 'OK, you've got this opportunity, don't mess it up.'"

"We don't feel safe yet," Courtney adds. "We feel like the hard work has just begun."

***ETERNAL BLUE* IS OUT NOW VIA RISE. SPIRITBOX PLAY DOWNLOAD IN JUNE**

Spiritbox (left to right): Mike Stringer, Courtney LaPlante, Bill Crook, Zev Rose

**"I WAS CONSTANTLY TOLD THAT I WAS SHIT"**

COURTNEY LAPLANTE

# The View From 2022

## Courtney and Mike predict the next 12 months

**What are your New Year's resolutions?**
**Courtney:** "My resolution is to be solidly in great shape by February 16… the first day of our US tour. It's very physical, and I want to put on a consistently great show for six weeks."
**Mike:** "I would like to move from Canada to the United States in 2022."

**What's going to be the biggest thing in metal in 2022?**
**Courtney:** "I think there will be a deathcore revival; everyone will probably be going really heavy again, using less whiny, high singing."
**Mike:** "I think there will be a nu metal revival. I feel like the '20-year cycle' is a real thing, and people are really starting to show interest in that era of music again."

**What event or issue will define the world in 2022?**
**Courtney:** "The economic effects of the pandemic on the supply chain, and hopefully a workers' revolution, too."
**Mike:** "Cryptocurrency will be a talking point, whether it's good or bad news."

THE NEW HEAVY 2022

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: JOHN McMURTRIE

# Metal Is

# Dead

**Don’t panic: so is every other genre! Inspired by everyone from Deftones to Drake, Merseyside’s Loathe have ripped up music’s rulebook. And not even they know what’s coming next…**

THE NEW HEAVY 2022

Drake changed Loathe guitarist and co-vocalist Erik Bickerstaffe's life on the 10A bus from St Helens to Liverpool. Granted, the Canadian rapper wasn't physically there on the seat next to him as they chugged through Dovecot and Knotty Ash, but his creative spirit was.

It was 2014, and Erik was still a member of Our Imbalance, the band that acted as a precursor to Loathe. Until that point, he had been a militant metalcore fan: if it wasn't Attack Attack! or We Came As Romans, he wasn't interested. "I was: 'Fuck hip hop, fuck country music, fuck Behemoth, fuck everything else,'" he says.

That bus ride upended everything. "I was like, 'Actually, I'm bored of this Attack Attack! album, I'm going to listen to *Nothing Was The Same* by Drake,'" he says. "I didn't know any of his music, didn't care about that stuff. But the artwork interested me."

As Erik listened to Drizzy's 2013 high water mark, the scales fell from his eyes. There was more to life than crabcore and sideswept fringes. In fact, there was a whole world out there that he'd shut himself off from.

That literal journey was the start of a longer metaphorical one that changed the direction of Erik's life and that of his band. Walls crumbled, boundaries dissolved and a whole new future opened up in front of them. It has brought the Merseysiders to a place today where they're not only the most exhilarating young band in Britain, they're doing more than most to drag metal into a future it doesn't know it needs to be in. In a scene that can get wrapped up in its own comfort zone, Loathe are agents of change.

"I sometimes feel like people see us in a light that we're not," says Erik. "I don't see us as a metalcore band. I don't see us as a metal band. We came from that world, and maybe we have traits that connect us to it, but that isn't what this band is. We don't want to be pigeonholed."

"We want to try anything, but keep it within the realm of Loathe," says his bandmate, singer Kadeem France.

And what is the realm of Loathe?

Kadeem mulls it over for a few seconds, and then a few seconds more. "I'll get back to you on that," he says.

Loathe have released two of the most striking albums of the last few years. The first was 2020's *I Let It In And It Took Everything*, a record that felt like 49 minutes and 19 seconds of evolution in action. The second was last February's out-of-the-blue *The Things They Believe*, which dispensed entirely with metal's defining characteristics – guitar, drums and vocals – in favour of meditative electronic ambience. It was released alongside candles and incense for the full mid-lockdown flotation tank experience.

"It *is* an experience, man, 100%," says Kadeem. "We want people to live in the universe of Loathe. For us, this has always been just bigger than a band."

We're sitting in a dimly lit East London pub amid the bustle of an early evening drinking crowd. The four members of Loathe – Erik and Kadeem plus bassist Feisal El-Khazragi

**"IT WAS UNHEARD OF FOR A BLACK KID TO LISTEN TO METAL"**

KADEEM FRANCE

Kadeem France: still happy, but no longer hanging around with Snow White

and drummer Sean Radcliffe – still sport the stylish black suits they wore for *Metal Hammer*'s cover shoot. They look like designer blags. "I wish," says Kadeem, laughing. "It's all ASOS. Cheap."

The suits are more than just an image. They're a signifier of who Loathe are, an against-the-grain uniform designed to set them apart. "Our original style started to get so played out within the scene, so we thought, 'OK, let's try something different'," says Kadeem. "We're big on rebranding ourselves when we get to a certain stage."

As the clothes indicate, Loathe present themselves as a unit. Songwriting is collective and collaborative. No one is wedded to their instruments, at least in the studio (Kadeem might play the drums; Sean sometimes plays guitar; they all pitch in with loops, beats and electronic textures).

Today, though, it's just Erik (long-haired, bespectacled) and Kadeem (tall, dreads tied up) on the other side of the tape recorder, albeit separately. The former is focussed, attentive and not short of confidence in his band's abilities. "Do I know how good we are?" he says at one point. "Yes."

In Kadeem's telling, Erik is Loathe's arse-kicker-in-chief. "He's non-stop, constant," says Kadeem. "You need someone who's going to do that. If Erik wasn't giving us a kick up the arse, no one would."

But Erik is a worrier too. "I'm the one that's there hunched over and fiddling with stuff and worried that things aren't right: 'Oh, that graphic might be a little too far to the left'," he says. But I just think, 'We've got something special, don't fuck it up.' Kadeem lets things flow over him more. It seems that he enjoys everything."

This is true. The singer seems more at ease in himself than his bandmate. It could be something that was instilled by an early career in the performing arts. He was a child actor who did work as an extra in *Grange Hill* and *Hollyoaks*, as well as appearing in several pantomimes. "I was Happy in *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs*," he says without a twinge of embarrassment.

He still has a hankering to return to the theatre at some point. Not long ago, his agent got in touch with him and asked if he wanted to audition for anything, a by-product of his raised profile. "I'd like to think I could do two things at once, like Jared Leto or something," he says. Then he adds: "I'm not saying I want to *be* Jared Leto, but it's doable. One thing would help the other."

But all that's for the future. For the now, Kadeem and Erik are focused entirely on Loathe. "There are times when I think, 'Why aren't we further along in our career?'" says Erik. "Then I realise what we've achieved so far, and it blows my mind."

Kadeem France first crossed paths with Erik Bickerstaffe in a Funeral For A Friend moshpit in 2011. "This is a shit pit," Erik told the lanky kid he'd just bumped into. "Do you want to start another?"

They did, but it would be another few months before the pair met properly. Kadeem was drumming in local metalcore outfit Escapists. When they turned up to record a session at the house of someone a friend had told them about, it turned out to be the guy from the moshpit. "Even then, I thought he was the most incredible musician I'd ever met," says Kadeem. "I still do to this day."

Erik grew up in St Helens, 10 miles east of Liverpool, playing in school bands and at his local church (his mother is devoutly religious; Erik no longer considers himself a Christian). By his teens, he had his own group, Our Imbalance. "Crabcore, skinny jeans," he says with a laugh. "We wanted to be the new Attack Attack!"

Kadeem came from the working class Liverpool suburb of Toxteth. "It was a rough area, but I feel lucky to have grown

Erik Bickerstaffe: arse-kicker-in-chief

up there," he says. "Liverpool's a very white city, but Toxteth is a very multicultural place. I felt comfortable there."

Kadeem's dad wasn't around growing up, a subject he addressed on Loathe's single *Two-Way Mirror*. He was raised by his mum and his grandad. "He was pretty much my dad," he says. Kadeem and his father have since reconciled; the pair were up all night drinking following Loathe's last London gig pre-lockdown, in February 2020.

Kadeem devoured hip hop as a kid before pivoting to heavy music after hearing friends jam in the school music room. "I went from hip hop to 'Metal, metal, metal, metal!'" he says. "I didn't listen to anything else for years.

He says that he stuck out like a sore thumb in Toxteth. "I had a massive afro, and I'd straighten it down to the point where I'd have a side fringe and all of that," he says. "I'd get a few dirty looks. It was unheard of for a black kid to listen to metal." By contrast, the metal scene was welcoming. "No one cared about where you came from or what you were wearing," he says. "We all just had this love for the music."

## "WE DON'T WANT TO BE PIGEONHOLED"

ERIK BICKERSTAFFE

Kadeem left Escapists in 2011, and joined Our Imbalance the following year. The latter released an EP before changing their name to Loathe; by then Sean Radcliffe was also onboard. "That was the big leap forward," says Kadeem of the name change. "That's when we started to think the sky was the limit with what we could do."

Their first EP under their new name, 2015's *Prepare Consume Proceed*, featured Kadeem in a Slipknot-esque hockey mask on the cover. As of right now, it's the last clichéd thing Loathe did.

We need to talk about The Death Of Genre. It's a notion that's central to what Loathe are about. If their 2017 debut album, *The Cold Sun*, still bore metalcore's DNA, *I Let It In And It Took Everything* was partly an exercise in dismantling boundaries and *The Things They Believe* went even further.

"A lot of people don't do much with their music," says Erik. "They stay in one lane. We don't want to do that. The idea of the 'genre' is dying."

He says "a lot of people", but he could be saying "a lot of people within the metal scene." For much of its 50-year lifespan, metal has followed the set of holy scriptures pinned on the inside of the walled garden in which it exists: thou shalt sound like this; thou shalt not work with people like that; thou shalt never, ever cross the streams.

Recently, though, things have started to shift. A generation of heavy bands are cracking open the gates and letting everything flood in and wash over them. Loathe are right there, front and centre. Erik has been listening to ABBA and Simply Red recently. "*Holding Back The Years*," he says admiringly of the latter's sappy 1985 blue-eyed-soul hit, a song released several years before he was born. "I really want us to do a ballad. I don't think you should ever rule anything out."

Bassist Feisal El-Khazragi, formerly of Holding Absence

Unsurprisingly, the rest of the band think along the same lines. Kadeem would love to collaborate with rapper Earl Sweatshirt or psychedelic hip hop/jazz guru Flying Lotus. "We want to try a lot of different things we wouldn't be allowed to get away with in the metal world," he says. "It feels like we can be anything we want."

They've had little pushback from their own fans, but they know there'll be resistance from sections of the wider community. "Change is inevitable and it's good, especially in a genre like metal that isn't as successful commercially as it could or should be," says Erik. "Bringing in influences from other genres and blending them into metal is going to broaden the landscape, and broaden the people who are into it. People won't like it for a while, but I believe it's necessary."

Other people have recognised this in Loathe. In 2020, Deftones frontman Chino Moreno gave the band his papal blessing. "This song is better than all your stupid music and mine," he said, posting a link to the video of *Two-Way Mirror*, blowing Loathe's collective minds (Deftones are an acknowledged influence; their thumbprint is visible on *I Let It In And It Took Everything*).

As we speak, Loathe are in the early stages of writing material for their next album, though they're frustratingly cagey about what it will sound like. Or maybe they just don't know themselves.

"I like our music being a mystery box," says Erik. "I like people not knowing what it's going to be. We don't want it to be: [causally] 'Oh, here's another song, here's an album.' These are offerings from us that are very personal and take a lot of time to create. It actually hurts to take it out of us sometimes. If we just put it out there willy-nilly, it decreases the value."

Kadeem is marginally more illuminating on where Loathe are heading next. "It's way more raw, but it's not stuff a typical, quote-unquote, metal band would go for."

Will it come out in 2022? "I don't want to say yes," says Erik firmly. Then he gives in. "But it's probable."

It's getting late and Loathe have to get a train back up north. We finish our drinks and shake hands. Then Kadeem remembers something.

"That thing you asked about what is 'the Realm of Loathe?'," he says. "It changes all the time. I feel like we're never really the same band for more than two years, or more than a year even. We're just continually evolving. And it feels like we're going through that metamorphosis right now."

And with that, Loathe head out into the night, and into whatever future they decide.

**LOATHE'S NEW TRACK, *DIMORPHOUS DISPLAY*, WILL BE RELEASED ON JANUARY 5 VIA SHARPTONE. THEY PLAY DOWNLOAD AND OUTBREAK FESTIVALS IN JUNE**

Sean Radcliffe: drums... sometimes guitars... whatever's needed

# The View From 2022

## Erik and Kadeem predict the next 12 months

**What are your New Year's resolutions?**
**Kadeem:** "Be more productive. Sort my life out when it comes to being productive. Do more and say less."
**Erik:** "To travel as much as I can. To sort out my relationship with food... sleep... my health. Sort my life out, basically."

**What's going to be the biggest thing in metal in 2022?**
**Kadeem:** "Hip hop and grime are dominant, but I really believe we're going to see a rise in metal and rock. It's going to be how it was back in the day. Even on TikTok, it's becoming a thing. I want Loathe to be at the forefront of that."

**What event or issue will define the world in 2022?**
**Kadeem:** "Adjusting fully to normal life again, but also navigating through life with the pandemic still being a thing."
**Erik:** "I hope that we as a species can start appreciating things more and communicating more and just understanding each other in general."

THE NEW HEAVY 2022

# Sleep Token are a Mystery

**Anonymous members, no interviews and sold-out shows: Vessel et al have become a modern metal phenomenon. We followed them on tour to try and find out more**

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: ANDY FORD

SLEEP TOKEN

THE NEW HEAVY 2022

Sleep Token vocalist Vessel stands in front of 1,500 people at Birmingham's 02 Institute, and the room falls silent. All eyes are fixed on the masked and cloaked singer for a sign – any sign – that might betray some message or hidden meaning behind the band's mystique.

"We love you!" cries a young woman. Finally, the spell is broken, and the crowd erupt into cheers that Vessel politely acknowledges with a slight nod. Then he moves, and the church-like quietude falls again. Leaning towards the mic, for the briefest of moments it seems Vessel's five years of almost total silence will end, with Birmingham about to receive gospel from one of metal's most enigmatic forces. Instead, he clenches his hands together in a sign of gratitude, saying everything by saying absolutely nothing – and everyone loses their minds.

We're at the second night of Sleep Token's eight-date UK tour, and since emerging in 2016, they've maintained an iron grip on their anonymity: they obscure their faces, they don't talk onstage, and they have only ever done one interview – with this very magazine in 2017. The closest comparison is Ghost, but even they had 'Nameless Ghouls' who acted as regular spokespeople until Tobias Forge eventually broke cover, a decade into the band. It's all very impressive – but who the hell *are* they?

Here's what we know: in that 2017 interview, Vessel told us that their music is all in service to 'Sleep', a mysterious deity whose roots stretch back centuries. "How we got here is as irrelevant as who we are – what matters is the music and the message," they said. "We are here to serve Sleep and project His message." And… that's about it. Cheers for the insight, pal.

Despite – or perhaps because of – their secrecy, Sleep Token are fast becoming a cult sensation. While the lore is centred around Vessel, Sleep Token describe themselves as a collective, suggesting a collaborative effort between seasoned musicians, all feeding into the art. That may go some way to describe their fluid approach to genre, pulling elements of everything from tech metal and alternative to pop and R&B – part of a new breed of heavy bands who aren't afraid to embrace multiple genres, as well as nontraditional ways of working.

In 2019, they drip-fed a series of singles that eventually became their debut album, *Sundowning*, rather than going ahead with a straightforward release. Even though they couldn't tour during the pandemic, last September's *This Place Will Become Your Tomb* charted at No. 39 in the UK, and this current run will conclude at London's 2,000-capacity Shepherd's Bush Empire. It's no small feat.

"Sleep Token are an expression of where metal is in the 2020s," says Ihsahn, co-founder of black metal legends Emperor and pioneering avant garde solo artist, who's on the same label as the collective. "From the first time I heard them, I was completely intrigued – the way they mix modern metal elements with very dark moods, but also very clear, modern R&B-style production values."

Sleep Token are by no means the first anonymous collective in metal, but their symbol-emblazoned masks, dark body paint, and use of everything from Nordic runes to Hindu symbology in their artwork have piqued the curiosity of metal fans and fellow musicians.

"It's similar to what we had with the black metal scene, with the masks and mystery that helps to raise it all," Ihsahn explains. "Emperor wouldn't be where they were without that theatricality, because we needed to do something to distance ourselves from the spotty teenagers we were!

"It creates a clear distance and space between the art and the artist," he continues. "I've always appreciated artists who created that distance – going back, you can watch all these interviews with David Bowie but it never feels like you *knew* him. The art he created was an offering and you just had to try to understand it."

Of course, with Vessel it's even more difficult. Our attempt to get answers in 2017 was like grasping at mist: when we asked why they wished to remain anonymous, Vessel turned the conversation towards what he thought was truly important – the art itself. "Our identities are unimportant," he said. "Music is marketed on who is or isn't in a band; it's pushed, prodded and moulded into something it isn't. Vessel endeavours to keep the focus on His offerings."

When asked what the future held, Vessel simply replied: "Nothing. Lasts. Forever." Does that mean there's a time limit on the band? What the fuck is going on?

**"SLEEP TOKEN ARE WHERE METAL IS IN THE 2020s"**
**IHSAHN**

It's tinfoil hat time. Outside of live performances, Vessel has only appeared in music videos. His first onscreen appearance came as a shadowy, grasping figure in the 2016 video for *Thread The Needle*, before appearing maskless in the 2017 video for *Calcutta* – albeit with Slipknot/*Before I Forget* style editing that only showed his mouth, cheek and eye. He's become more prominent in recent videos – even telekinetically taking out a room of hazmat-suited goons in the video to *Alkaline* – but still no obvious, overarching narrative has emerged.

Elsewhere, his mask has made its own separate appearances. In the video for *Fields Of Elation* it floated free in a body of water, and in *Nazareth* it appeared standing alone in the video's final moments, before appearing in blink-and-you'll-miss-it moments in *Jaws*, where it's worn by the video's star. Which raises the question: is Vessel the man behind the mask, or something the mask brings forth?

Sleep Token's acolytes have been searching for clues. In a Discord server set up by Coventry-based fan Chris, they pore over the band's lyrics, album artwork, music videos and merchandise in an attempt to decipher hidden meanings, like a metal take on *The Da Vinci Code*. "It was actually through *Metal Hammer* that I got into the band," Chris tells us. "Reading the interview with Vessel on the website, I wanted to find out more. I took to Reddit to see if there was a community for the band and at the time there wasn't, so I decided to create it."

Now numbering more than 900 members, the group have become adept at deciphering codes left by the band. They discovered that a string of numbers featured on a t-shirt design were coordinates for a 'whale fall' – an event where a whale's carcass falls to the ocean floor and becomes a source of nourishment for an entire ecosystem. When *This Place Will Become Your Tomb* was released, Benjamin, one of the admins, even took on the semi-joking role of Keeper Of The Lore, maintaining and steering discussions for each new song.

"I loved the hidden identities and world-building the band was presenting," he explains. "There was a whole

Who is that masked man?
Answers on a postcard...

experience outside of just the music. The new album features heavy imagery of a decomposing whale and the animals that would feed on it; a representation of life in death – a topic lyrically discussed by Vessel frequently – and eternal recurrence."

The Discord continues to provide fascinating insights into what the band may – or may not – be exploring through their art. But without any form of 'official' statement on their theories, and with a potential fixed end point for Sleep Token, couldn't the fanatics be setting themselves up for disappointment down the road? "Nothing lasts forever – until then we Worship," Chris says matter-of-factly.

Aside from discussions on mythology, the Discord has also become a social club that binds people together. "The Discord community is amazing," says New York-based fan Veronica, aka BluKittie. "There are people from all over the world and we share the same love and passion for the band. We are always there for each other. Last year my father passed away and the members of the community helped me through that rough time, and still do. I am just happy to have found friends there."

An hour before Birmingham's 02 Institute opens, the queue is already snaking down the street as far as the eye can see. At the band's request, we're not allowed backstage lest we see their faces, but we do speak to their support act, solo artist AA Williams. Like Sleep Token, she's found an audience with metallers even though her music spans alternative, pop, soul and metal – a sound we've previously tagged as 'death gospel'.

"I think we work pretty well together," she says. "It's great to see an artist who is able to explore both pop and really heavy music without the need to hold back or overcompensate on either element. The shifts in dynamics really come to life live, and their crowd utterly lap it up – it's like going to church."

Are there any difficulties that come from playing with such a secretive act? Has anyone tried to get her to reveal Sleep Token's identity? "Well, it's not like we've had to sign NDAs or anything," she says. "At the same time, you do want to make sure you're not impinging on their privacy, and respecting their choice to present their art in a particular way. If anyone asks who they are, I think I'll make up a celebrity – it's Robert De Niro. Next question – ha ha ha!"

Tonight AA commands rapt attention, but there's no competing with the headliners. All chatter is silenced as the room plunges into darkness. Moments later, Vessel strides onto the stage alone to cheers of approval, his mask the only thing visible against now-muted lighting. He tinkles the ivories for *Atlantic* and the crowd are soon singing along to every word, even though the album has barely been out two months.

For 90 minutes, Sleep Token hold attention in a way that defies logic. How can a band that don't speak be so damned *expressive*? Compared to the stagecraft of bombastic arena bands such as Iron Maiden or Sabaton, Sleep Token are low key, but Vessel radiates gravitas, his twisting and grasping movements bringing to mind the theatrics of interpretive dance, where each flick of the wrist could be conveying some hidden meaning. The fans are utterly enraptured, moshing and singing along with religious fervour, lending credence to the band's social media descriptions of their shows as 'rituals'.

As it was in Birmingham, so it is in Glasgow, Sheffield, Dublin and beyond. By the time the tour arrives at London's sold-out Shepherd's Bush Empire, it's clear that, much like Ghost before them, Sleep Token are fast outpacing their status as a cult phenomenon, smaller academies no longer able to contain their rapidly growing fanbase. If Birmingham was about reverence, London is outright revelry – an irrepressible crowd engaging in a bacchanalian frenzy that has little to do with the extortionate bar prices and everything to do with the explosive performance unfolding onstage. And then, a couple of lads start Cossack dancing in the middle of a circle pit. Sleep help us…

Not to be outdone, Sleep Token bring out their own dance troupe for *Fall For Me*. Not that they need any help capturing people's attention: here, Sleep Token are preaching to the converted, a cult threatening to spill over into the mainstream.

No one knows what direction Sleep Token will go in next, and it's not as if they're about to tell us. But then, that's how things have *always* been with the band – each release a mystery that fans can't wait to unwrap. "When I heard the second album, there was no indication of where they were going, so in my mind it just had so many seeds of development," Ihsahn says. "There's more maturity and there's clearly something they are building towards, though exactly what that is, is impossible to say…"

Perhaps the stock answer from Vessel, five years on, would still be "nothing lasts forever". Will they push their sound even further? Will they start conducting interviews? Will they *ever* unmask? Right now, anything is possible – and that's what makes Sleep Token so exciting.

**"VESSEL IS ACTUALLY ROBERT DE NIRO!"**
AA WILLIAMS

***THIS PLACE WILL BECOME YOUR TOMB* IS OUT NOW VIA SPINEFARM**

## The View From 2022

**As Vessel doesn't talk, we predict the next 12 months on his behalf**

**What are his New Year's resolutions?**
To ensure a Sleep shrine in every home in the UK, perfect for accepting His offerings. Also for Vessel to kill fewer people using his telekinetic abilities (see: the video for *Alkaline*) and to use them for something more constructive instead, like whale conservation.

**What's going to be the biggest thing in metal in 2022?**
Sleep Token will engage in a holy war with Ghost, ultimately triumphing and ending the line of Papas. Satan will convert to Sleep worship, rendering the whole 'satanism' thing redundant. Deicide will become door-to-door missionaries, converting people to the Sleep cause. Black metal musicians will end up switching to country, singing about the good ol' days when you could burn churches and burn inverted crucifixes into your head.

**What event or issue will define the world in 2022?**
Sleep Token will make history by hosting the first livestream to be beamed directly into your dreams. A bit like with U2 and Apple, the whole thing will cause a massive fuss but ultimately blow over. Mastodon will try to do the same and end up falling through space/time like a live-action replication of *Crack The Skye*.

Form an orderly queue for worshipping at Vessel's feet

THE NEW HEAVY 2022

# The new face of Extreme

**Satanic slave mythology, secret anarchist societies and the Bee Gees. Put plainly, there is no one in metal right now like Zeal & Ardor's enigmatic mastermind, Manuel Gagneux**

WORDS: POLLY GLASS • PICTURES: DEREK BREMNER • MAKE UP ARTIST: GEMMA STAFFORD

ZEAL & ARDOR

THE NEW HEAVY 2022

Manuel Gagneux:
music with a message

As a child in Switzerland, Manuel Gagneux had fits of rage. The son of a white Swiss biologist and a black American jazz singer, he was acutely aware of not fitting in. Not really Swiss, not really a black kid, he wrestled with the feeling through his primary school years. Perhaps it's what we hear now in his music. He still doesn't really know where it came from – just that it was there.

"I was a super-angry kid," he nods, unhesitating. We're mid-interview at a London photo studio, a few hours before *Hammer*'s makeup artist covers him in blood for our shoot. Until now his responses have been full of self-aware humour; friendly and engaging, if a little hard to pin down. Now, for a moment, he's serious.

"It kind of stopped when I was 11. And that was also about the time when I started playing music. So guess it is my… 'balance point'?" He breaks into giggles. "I don't know. You can edit that more eloquently!"

In an era where celebrity mystique often feels all but dead, the 33-year-old is something of an enigma. From early experiences at back alley seances, squat gigs and unsettling contemporary art shows as a boy in Switzerland – all of which ultimately drove him to New York aged 22 – he's gone on to spearhead some of metal's most compelling sounds with Zeal & Ardor, the project he founded in 2013.

Nine years later, these sounds are more compelling than ever, peaking on album number three, the self-titled *Zeal & Ardor*. A rich, intoxicating cocktail of white-hot screams, menacing spoken-word passages and haunting Delta ambiance, it's the biggest, most ambitious Zeal & Ardor record yet. It plays with your expectations. Brutal guitars and blastbeats bleed into mournful spiritual tones and juddering electronics. Genres are bent, twisted and generally fucked up in delicious ways; think Faith No More dipped in fire, or Meshuggah jamming with Tom Waits and Nine Inch Nails. All of it delivered with a maturity that separates it from 2016's *Devil Is Fine* and 2018's *Stranger Fruit*.

At this point it's stranger than ever to think that Zeal & Ardor started the way it did. As a joke, of sorts – in response to an offhand question Manuel posted on 4chan, leading him to merge black metal with old chain-gang music and modern Satanist ideals. 'Black metal blues', if you will.

So how has he come so far from such beginnings? Coffee may be part of the answer. Manuel drinks a lot of coffee… "I have a thing for caffeine," he grins as the band's publicist takes orders. "I have an espresso machine at home. Plus a lot of yerba mate; there's mate sodas in Germany and Switzerland. Normally you mix those with vodka in the evening. They call it 'hippie speed', because it's a tea but it gets you fucked up and keeps you awake. I do it without the vodka and that definitely helps with being creative."

On face value, the Manuel Gagneux we meet today is very different to the one you'll hear on *Zeal & Ardor* – and not at all the cackling church-burner one might anticipate from someone with Satan written into his band's definition. Or indeed, someone so engrossed in the darkest reaches of black metal history (Burzum and Mayhem are among his influences).

Softly spoken, he has the gentle manner of someone not trying to prove anything. His answers are considered and concise. He smiles more readily than you expect. Pristine brown leather shoes, black trousers and a black top lend him an air of anonymity. A bottle of designer water sits next to his espresso. In another life he could have been about to go and tune up for an orchestra recital.

There are ripples of eccentricity though, rising and falling throughout our conversation. Withheld secrets. The

INSET: PRESS/MEHDI BENKLER.

Manuel's project has got bigger and bigger

## "I WAS A SUPER-ANGRY KID"

aforementioned "hippie speed". Little darknesses and surprises, offset with dry, self-deprecating humour. When he's conscious of sounding pretentious he adopts a deep, fruity tone that's pure Frank-N-Furter from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. He's fun to talk to.

Yet *Zeal & Ardor* is clearly no joke. The goal was simple and serious: make a record that sounded great, realising the big ideas he'd brewed since the band began. "There was no game plan," he says. "We just honed into how we wanted to sound. And a huge part of that was retaining the fun aspect of it."

Back at the start of 2020, Manuel was working on music for a theatre piece in Zurich. When lockdown hit that March, the piece was cancelled. He retreated home to Basel and the world… well, you know the rest.

Hunkering down in the basement of the local bar he used to co-own ("a squat-y, punky bar, full of tags and awful imagery, beer's cheap") he worked on songs, including some he'd previously written for Eric Garner, a black man killed in Staten Island after police put him in a chokehold in 2014. Following the death of George Floyd, also at the hands of the police, Manuel took those songs and made the hard-hitting *Wake Of A Nation* EP. Lyrically it was a sharp, brutally direct contrast to the smokescreened nature of the first two Zeal & Ardor albums. He deliberately didn't do press for it. "We didn't want to exploit the death of a man for our own financial gain; and that would imply that, so we elected not to do it."

Did you feel a responsibility to make music that made a statement? You obviously had a substantial, engaged audience by that point. "To a degree, yeah," he nods.

"When I write music I always try not to have my critics in my head, or my audience in my head. So that's the only time I actually had who's listening to me right now [in my head], and how can I address them in a productive or positive way."

Around the same time he wrote an article for *Kerrang!*, emphasising that the world needs "boring" equality more than flashy demonstrations and thrilling, quotable conflict. "The change we desperately need is a wholly unspectacular one," he wrote. "One without heroes and martyrs, but one of norm." Coming from someone as un-boring as Manuel, it was interesting reading. How do you reconcile such a perspective with being an artist?

"Oh yeah, it's grandly hypocritical, and I'm very much aware of that," he notes. "But I think these are just different shoes as an artist and as an activist, and I'm very cautious of calling myself [an activist], 'cause what the fuck am I doing, just yelling at people?!"

The real extent of Manuel's political activity remains mysterious. He belongs to an anarcho-syndicalist collective (an anarchist school of thought that seeks to abolish the capitalist order) but keeps details firmly under wraps.

"For legal reasons I can't really get into what we do."

Oh, go on…

"I'm sorry, I can't!" he laughs. "I've been active with them since, I guess, 2010… but it's a… who knows who it is?!"

Covert anarchism notwithstanding, he has no plans to mix politics with music again following *Wake Of A Nation*. "I do think it's gonna be the only time that we're directly addressing things like that," he says, "but it felt kind of right to do it then."

Even so, it may have left a subconscious thumbprint on *Zeal & Ardor*. The album carries tastes of *Wake…*'s urgency in *Bow* (*'Cower in shame… bow down to the American way'*) and *Hold Your Head Low*. Broadly, though, it operates in the fictional Zeal & Ardor universe – in which American slaves turned to Satan, instead of the Christian God of their masters. Manuel keeps specific narratives to himself, leaving listeners to find their own meanings.

"There's one that I have in mind, but I'm not eager to share it because every time I'm convinced that 'this is *obviously* this and this', I'll hear what the audience thinks it means and that's exactly as valid as my point of view. And in anticipation of that, I'd rather not disclose what I think it is."

Keeping hold of all the reins, Manuel plays every instrument on the record except drums. On the 40-minute commute from his home in Basel to Hutch Sounds, where the album was made, he listened to music by Tom Waits, Sophie, 100 Gecs and Björk. Although the end product is considerably heavier than those artists, their individualistic edges are writ large across *Zeal & Ardor*.

"Tom Waits and Bjork have this uncanny thing that when you hear 10 seconds of it, you're transported to their weird world," he enthuses. "I adore that."

Use of German lyrics, notably in the raw, livid *Götterdämmerung* (translated as 'twilight of the gods', and sharing its name with a Wagner opera), adds to Manuel's own "weird world". At home in Switzerland it's his first language, but he also speaks French as well as English.

"It just sounds aggressive as fuck," he reasons. "And there's a couple of [18th century Romantic German writer] Goethe quotes in there. He was this huge occultist too. He was a strange man."

Elsewhere, the layered, cinematic quality in places like the title track can perhaps be traced back to the books Manuel was reading. "This is a great opportunity to say, 'Well I read this *fantastic* book that you've never…'" he chuckles. "It gets really douchey when you say, '*Obviously* it's *Finnegans Wake*' or some shit like that! Ha ha! I've been reading a lot of pulp actually, like [horror fantasy collection] *In the Court of The Yellow King*, but also just trash Youtube videos."

Indeed, Manuel is no highbrow snob. For all the music he made, his pandemic lockdown was much like most people's: "I had this idea that 'I'm gonna be a different person, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I'm gonna read the fuck out of *everything*!' Two minutes later I'm on the couch, horizontally, watching some stupid shit."

He also did a streamed performance of unlikely mash-ups for the online Slay At Home festival: *Holy Diver* with *Stayin' Alive*, Meshuggah with Justin Timberlake, Papa Roach with Cher… Catch it on Youtube – it's a surprisingly effective set.

"Heavy metal in essence is a very silly thing," he observes. "It's *this* close to being ridiculous, but as long as there's this sense of 'we enjoy this and we actually mean it', it's fine. That's why I think I can still do it, and that's also why I think it's fiction. I do enjoy it, and I do mean it when I do it. But I'm also very aware that it's potentially very, very silly."

Outside Zeal & Ardor he makes pop music under the name Birdmask, and has an electronic project called GEIZ. He's also developing a VR game that looks to recreate the motion of flying in dreams – "I want to have that motion, actually make you fly. Kind of like swimming for a lot of people in dreams."

What do you do for fun?

"I write a lot, fiction, short stories, militaristic stuff," he says, a little shyly. "Other than that I'm fucking boring; I go on bike rides, I read a bit, less than I would like to. I spend most of my time in the studio writing music."

The new year promises to draw him out of the studio and on tour, including a run of UK support shows with Meshuggah. London's Royal Albert Hall is one of the stops. "We're really excited about it, we're working our asses off to make that really memorable."

Exactly what it will entail remains to be seen, though if budget were no issue it would be an enormous affair ("like, 50 people onstage, stomping, chanting and mingling with the audience so you wouldn't notice where the stage ends and who's part of the show"), alongside the Swedish extreme metal legends. By the time you read this they'll also have toured the US with Opeth and Mastodon. The angry kid from Basel has come a long way, whatever Manuel says…

"I might have gained a little more confidence in what I do," he muses, "but other than that I'm still the same idiot… I'm pretty sure."

**_ZEAL & ARDOR_ IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 11 VIA MVKA. THE BAND TOUR THE UK LATER THIS YEAR WITH MESHUGGAH**

## The View From 2022

### Manuel predicts the next 12 months

**What are your New Year's resolutions?**
"I never have New Year's Resolutions, because without fail I don't do them. I feel like making the resolution is so satisfying that there's no real motivation to actually go through with it."

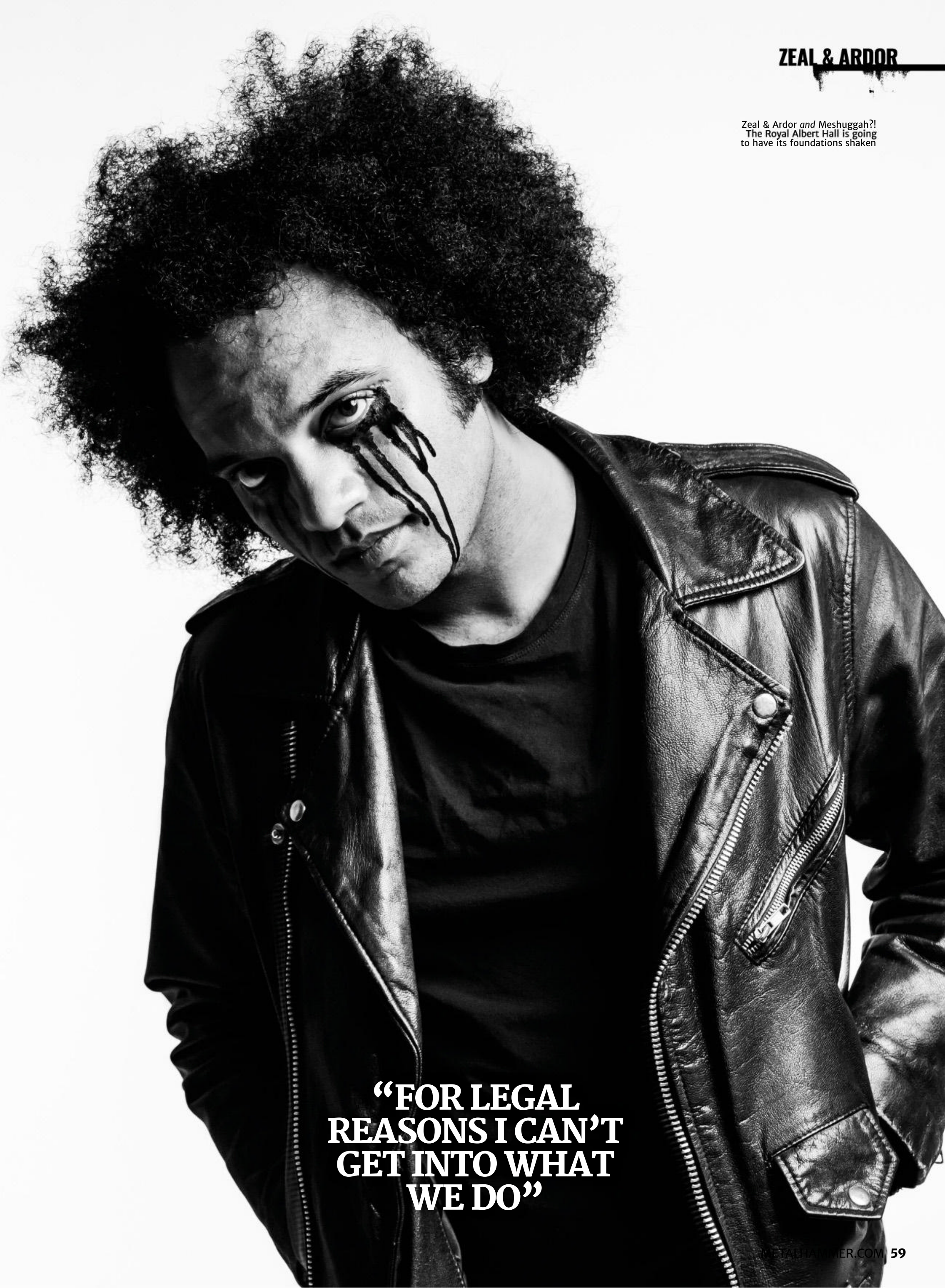
**What's going to be the biggest thing in metal in 2022?**
"Well for me personally, it's going to be going on tour with Meshuggah and watching them every night. It's pretty fucking cool! We've spoken a little bit, like we played the same festival a couple of times, and it was just like [high voice] 'Hey! Hi! Ahhh, you're gods!'"

**Didn't you have a similar meet-your-heroes moment with Tom Morello?**
"We were in Berlin and he was like, 'We should go to this bar', and it was this little squatty punky bar, and he probably just noticed we were nervous and came over with this huge tray of tequila shots."

**What event or issue will define the world in 2022?**
"Fucked if I know! I mean, if I knew that I'd be investing my money heavily right now! But I'll go with… um… fuck… I'm trying to think of anything serious. I can't think of anything, without sounding really, really tragic! Probably just… taxing the very rich, probably?"

# ZEAL & ARDOR

Zeal & Ardor *and* Meshuggah?!
The Royal Albert Hall is going
to have its foundations shaken



**“FOR LEGAL REASONS I CAN’T GET INTO WHAT WE DO”**

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# 2022: EVERYTHING ELSE YOU NEED TO KNOW

**With the bottleneck of tours and releases put on hold in 2020 only really beginning to shift at the end of last year, 2022 is still playing catch-up. What does that mean for us? A shit-ton of albums, shows, festival sets and just about everything else from some of the biggest and best bands in the game. Hooray!**

## AVENGED SEVENFOLD

**More than five years after *The Stage*, 2022 might finally be the year A7X come back with a, er, vengeance. But only if they can do it their way**

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

It's been five years since we got an album from metal's biggest 21st century success story, but 2022 could well be the year that A7X come roaring back onto the scene with all guns blazing. We caught up with frontman M Shadows, who was as enthusiastic as ever, to talk everything from new material to NFTs.

**How have the last few years been for you guys?**
"It's been good. We've been getting on well and, with Covid, we got to spend some much-needed

# "WE'RE VERY INFLUENCED BY KANYE WEST"

M SHADOWS

time with our families before we got back together to ideate what we were going to do next and re-establish our relationships."

**It was a weird time, right?**
"It just pointed out to us how weird our lives had been before Covid. The rat race, living in hotels. Now, piecing our lives back together, it's going to be weird to get back onstage and to mix a record and put it out; you realise how unusual a thing all of that is. We had dinner last night and we were saying that we don't want to come back into that space until we've got something new to offer. Coming back with no new stage production or nothing new? Man, that sounds so boring to us!"

**You're one of the first major metal artists to enter the world of NFTs. Firstly, for the layman, what exactly are NFTs?**
"They are digital assets, digital ownership. Our generation rent out our data: be that the skins on *Fortnite* or music, we rent that from a third party and if that platform goes down, you're shit outta luck. In this case, you own the guns from *Fortnite* and you can take them into *Call Of Duty*. Rather than the $9.99 you pay for Spotify and it trickles down to the artist, here you serve the superfan with a digital token and they own the music."

**What kind of things will A7X fans be able to get their digital fingerprints on?**
"Real world utility is important. So tickets to shows, meet and greets, exclusive merch, digital ticket stubs, you know, you go to the show and we will airdrop you an exclusive GIF to prove you were at that particular show. And we've some cherries on top of the cake, like going golfing with me. All of that's coming, but we're also building an online sandbox in the way that Coca-Cola or Reebok have, and you can jump into that online space and be part of a community. Just like *Ready Player One*, the rabbit hole can get deeper and deeper, and it gives you direct correlation with the fans."

**So, much like Metallica, Maiden and Slipknot, Avenged have become so much more than a band. You're a *brand* at this point…**
"Yeah, we just go where our interests are. This community-building… it'll never take the place of the music, that's always going to be number one, but it'll come to a point where people will be in our club, and even if they're not interested in our music, they won't leave the club because all their friends are there. That in a sense makes it bigger than the band. That idea of 'When are A7X going to put out a record? When am I going to see them live?', that'll still be a special event, but that's not going to be the mainstay of why you're involved."

**What do you think you learned after the surprise release of *The Stage* and how will that impact the release of the next record?**
"That's my favourite record of ours. We were in a moment in time and things were changing. I'm so happy we did it that way; we don't give a fuck about industry metrics. This next record, I don't know exactly how it comes out, but the record after that, we have no label! At that point we start implementing all the new ideas of going straight to the base of people that really care more. The new frontier excites us; expect very wacky ideas!"

**What plans for 2022 can you tell us about?**
"In January, we're going in to finish the strings on the record. The record's been recorded for a year, but we haven't been able to put the real strings on it because we couldn't fly out to Prague. When an orchestra have to social distance and they aren't sitting next to each other they can get out of tune, and we have just finally got to a place where we can use this 70-piece orchestra as we intended. We finish the record in February, mix it in March."

**Any little pointers of where the sound of the record is taking you?**
"There are so many influences… we're very influenced by Kanye West. The thing about Kanye is that he is pulling from such great soul music. I didn't grow up with that stuff – my dad listened to Boston and Alice Cooper, I didn't get that taste of black music and old soul. So, diving deep into jazz musicians… we're not trying to do a jazz record, but the chord changes and progressions are so eye-opening to us…"

**FOR MORE INFO ON AVENGED'S DEATHBATS CLUB NFTs, HEAD TO WWW.AVENGEDSEVENFOLD.COM. A NEW ALBUM'S EXPECTED THIS YEAR**

PRESS/KAMERON POLLOCK

# 10 THINGS WE WANT FROM GHOST IN 2022

**Here's everything we want from Papa et al in what could be a pivotal year**

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

PRESS/MIKAEL ERIKSSON

## A NEW ALBUM

This feels like a given, but we're making it clear regardless: four years on from *Prequelle*, it's surely time for the next era of Ghost to be unveiled. At time of going to press, we hadn't had official confirmation on any new album title or songtitles, but we know the fifth Ghost record is in the works, and with major tours incoming, surely 2022 is the year we'll get to hear it.

## A BIG CONCEPT

*Prequelle* managed to be both light and fun and yet densely packed with all manner of conceptual fun and games. Layered with apocalyptic medieval imagery and peddling narratives built around deadly plagues (and how pertinent would *that* end up being…), it continued Tobias's knack for matching big, subversive themes with *Dune*-sized earworms. With the man himself hinting at more conceptual tropes this time around, Ghost look set to pick up that trend. "The album that I have been working on, I came up with that concept years ago," Tobias told El Paso radio station KLAQ. "I wanted to make a record about the rise and ultimately the unescapable fails and falls of empires." Sounds fun!

## MORE SAX SOLOS

Look, this is a simple one. *That* moment in *Miasma* was amazing and became the defining 30 seconds of Ghost's live show. We want more.

## SPECTACULAR MUSIC VIDEOS

While deliciously spooky single *Hunter's Moon*, released as part of the soundtrack for last year's slasher sequel *Halloween Kills*, seemed to be a standalone single, it did at least continue Ghost's knack for a bloody great video. Packing visuals that looked dragged straight out of a Blumhouse production, it also marked the first in-video appearance of Papa Emeritus IV. The likes of *Rats, Dance Macabre* and *Kiss The Go-Goat* have all upped the ante for Ghost's quota of narratively loaded, super-campy music vids. It wouldn't seem right if the next chapter didn't do the very same.

## A 'DANDY' PAPA IV

Papa Emeritus IV is so glam he wouldn't look out of place on a *RuPaul's Drag Race* finale, bedecked as he is in dazzling green, black and gold robes sprinkled with jewels. Nonetheless, the last two eras of Ghost have always seen the 'Pope-ier' version of Tobias's leading character complemented by a suited-and-booted, dapper AF 'dandy' variant. It allowed for the live shows to be more energetic, camp and, quite frankly, fun, so we can only presume we'll get to see Papa IV sans robes and wiggling his ass off on a stage very soon, too.

## MORE YOUTUBE CHAPTERS

An essential part of the Ghost mythos (mainly because they help us understand what the fuck is going on), Ghost's Youtube 'Chapters' have been vital in filling in narrative gaps, revealing big plot-twists and giving us a big ol' load of belly-laughs. Hopefully the new album will be flanked by plenty more of them. Which, presumably, would mean even more of…

## SISTER IMPERATOR

One of the best things to come out of the Ghost Chapters was Sister Imperator, the matriarch pulling the strings behind the scenes of the Ghost clergy. A central part of the ongoing story, some subtle moments during the *Kiss The Go-Goat* video suggested her relationship to Cardinal Copia (now Papa IV… keep up!) may be more than clerical. Perhaps, even, parental?! Anyway, her last appearance was in *Chapter Nine: Tomb It May Concern*, bantering over a video chat with Papa IV, so she looks set to stick around. Huzzah!

## NEW GHOULS

The Nameless Ghouls tend to get a revamp on each album cycle, so hopefully they'll get some snazzy new looks as well. We even got two new Ghoulettes added to the Spook Squad during the *Prequelle* era. Could the clergy expand once more?

## A DUET WITH TWIN TEMPLE

Alright, we're reaching here, but given that everyone's favourite Satanic doo-wop band will be supporting Ghost across the States and Europe this year, why not get Alexandra and Zachary in a studio at some point for a session with Papa? It'd be Satanic. It'd be swinging. It'd be a match made in hell. Someone make this happen!

## AN EVEN BIGGER STAGE SHOW

"Originally, I thought Ghost was gonna become more like a theatre/installation sort of band," Tobias told us in 2019. "We would play Roadburn, arthouse concerts… I never thought we'd be the band that would play metal festivals, play in daylight, play with other bands." Oh, how wrong he was. Ghost's live show gets more impressive with each tour, their 2019 UK arena tour packing fire, confetti, dazzling lights, sax solos, costume changes and, for some reason, Cardinal Copia dicking about on a tricycle. Given they're playing even bigger venues the next time they come over – including a blockbuster stop-off at London's O2 – we can only imagine what they'll be bringing out next. Our prediction: taints will be tickled.

**WE NEED A GHOST/TWIN TEMPLE DUET**

# PARKWAY DRIVE

## The Aussie heavyweights will hit UK arenas, but is new music coming too?

Having had their *Reverence* UK victory lap well and truly buggered by the pandemic – a real heartbreaker for the Aussies given it was set to see them play their biggest ever shows here – Parkway finally look ready to hit our isle again this autumn with a handful of arena gigs across London, Manchester, Nottingham and Cardiff. For London, they'll be returning to the scene of their biggest ever UK headline show in 2019, rocking back up at Alexandra Palace for what is surely destined to be one of the single biggest, most explosive live shows of 2022. They've now had, literally, years to plan all manner of fiery gimmicks and crazy stage spectacles, and given how transparent Winston McCall and co are about wanting to raise the bar with each passing tour, we reckon they're going to have something special planned. And, if *that* wasn't enough reason to get excited, the five-piece will be supported by everyone's favourite Sheffield ragers, While She Sleeps!

By the time the UK shows finally come around, it'll have been well over *four years* since *Reverence*, meaning the chances of getting new Parkway Drive music before the dates kick off seem pretty high. Their last two albums have seen the band move further away from their metalcore origins and become increasingly prolific in churning out arena-friendly, super-chorusy heavy metal bangers (sprinkled with the occasional eyebrow-raising left field turn, of course – we're still looking at you, *Writings On The Wall*). More of the same incoming? We reckon so!

# VENOM PRISON

## Will 2022 see the hyped young death metallers hit the big leagues?

2022 feels like a pivotal year for Venom Prison. Having spent the last five years establishing themselves as one of the most vital young names in the UK death metal scene, they have made steady progress that has seen them hit Download, play two main stage slots at Bloodstock, land a set at Glastonbury, bag a *Metal Hammer* Golden God Best New Band Award and support everyone on tour from Dying Fetus to Trivium. Their blend of guttural extreme metal, brutalising hardcore and socially and politically conscious lyricism has struck a real chord in our country's metal underground, and with February's *Erebos* representing their first new album proper since 2019's blistering *Samsara*, there's rarely been a better opportunity for a British extreme metal band to stake their claim on the world stage.

"[This will be] a new kind of Venom Prison," singer Larissa Stupar teased about the album in an interview with *Metal Hammer*. "It's the beginning of a new phase for us – we've been around for six or seven years and we're only just getting started."

Lead single *Judges Of The Underworld* was a promising start, offering a groove-heavy slab of extremity sprinkled with ghostly clean vocals and a bigger-sounding production than we've heard from Venom Prison so far.

"It was great experience being able to be creative where this was the only thing that kept us sane and alive," Larissa added, "where we couldn't go and do anything else, so we profited from it just in a mental sense. We can't wait for people to experience it!"

PARKWAY DRIVE: PRESS/DAVE LEPAGE. VENOM PRISON: PRESS/ANDY FORD.

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# KORN

## Will new album *Requiem* see Jonathan Davis get happy?

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN

When Korn released 13th album *The Nothing* in September 2019, it was clear frontman Jonathan Davis had been through a deeply bleak time. Not only had his estranged wife, Deven, passed away from an accidental overdose, he had also lost his mum. Jonathan was subsequently left asking why his life had been filled with tragedy, and whether it was the cosmic price he had to pay in exchange for bringing thousands of fans joy through his music.

"I felt like I was constantly being hounded and fucked with my whole life because of all the good I've done in the world," he told us. "There's a lyric in the record where I said: *'For every good thing I've done there's a price to pay, and the price has left me horrified'* [album closer *Surrender To Failure*]. And the record is just me dealing with that."

Happily, Jonathan seems to be in a better place these days. During the pandemic Korn wrote a new album: *Requiem*. On its first single, *Start The Healing*, he sings: *'I can take it all away, the feelings / Break apart the pain and start the healing.'*

"It's time for me to start making myself feel better," he told Audacy of the song, which was inspired by a period of self-reflection after Covid hit. "Not be a *victim* anymore. Because everyone knows my life has been pretty tragic, with a lot of things going on, but I think all of us are responsible for our own happiness."

> **"EVERYONE KNOWS MY LIFE HAS BEEN PRETTY TRAGIC"**
> JONATHAN DAVIS

Produced by Chris Collier, who was an engineer on *The Nothing*, we doubt that *Requiem* will be all sunshine and rainbows – it's still Korn, after all – but we expect it to be more lyrically upbeat and perhaps a return to the 'party Korn' sound we know and love.

Last June, bassist Fieldy embarked on a leave of absence from the band while "dealing with some personal issues that at times have caused me to fall back on some of my bad habits," and Ra Díaz from Suicidal Tendencies has been filling in for him live. Although Fieldy isn't in Korn's new videos and photos, he did play on *Requiem*, and the band were quick to offer him their well wishes. "We love and support our brother, Fieldy," they said in a statement. "Health and family always comes first."

Like many bands, Korn had to cancel and reschedule shows because of Covid – Jonathan, guitarist Munky and drummer Ray Luzier even came down with the virus during their US run in the autumn. But last April, they staged the incredible Monumental livestream, on a rooftop at the set of *Stranger Things*: The Experience in LA. It was the first time a global audience had seen them play the likes of *Cold*, *You'll Never Find Me* and *Can You Hear Me* from *The Nothing*.

Next June they'll hit Download, where we'll *finally* get to see some of that material for real, alongside songs from *Requiem*. Each new Korn album brings a new sound and a new era – consider us hyped for this one. H

PRESS/TIM SACCENTI.

# BLOODYWOOD

## The Indian sensations are set to drop their long-awaited debut

Mixing the bounce of nu metal with Indian instrumentation and PMA lyrics, Bloodywood have become a phenomenon. First they broke the internet with their riotous covers, reaching their zenith with *Ari Ari*, the video showing bandmembers playing atop camels and horses in New Delhi. Then came a European tour, culminating in an appearance at Germany's mighty *Wacken*, no less. They documented their experiences in a film, the brilliantly named *Raj Against The Machine*.

We're expecting great things from February's debut album, *Rakshak*, which means 'protector' or 'guardian' in Hindi. The band's existing songs speak of social issues and call for togetherness: *Machi Bhasad* asks a generation to rise up, *Jee Veerey* tackles depression, *Yaad* highlights grief and *Endurant* slams bullying. The band also live by the principles in their lyrics, and have previously paid for counselling sessions for fans, used tour profits to buy an animal ambulance, and raised money for oxygen supplies during the pandemic.

Last November, they released a strident new single, *Gaddaar*. Hot on the heels of an urgent, electronic intro comes a massive, downtuned riff, propelled by the rousing, rallying beats of the dhol. Singer Jayant Bhadula and rapper Raoul Kerr trade vocals in earnest, taking on politicians in typically blunt and unflinching fashion. At the time of writing, it's already pushing half a million views.

Bloodywood will hit the UK in March and Bloodstock in August. Nu metal might be making a comeback, but no one is doing anything as fresh or as thrilling as these Desi boys.

# IN THIS MOMENT

## New music is coming – but when?

March will mark two years since the release of In This Moment's last album, 2020's *Mother* – a record that produced another breakout single in *The In-Between* and, perhaps most memorably of all, a raucous cover of Queen's *We Will Rock You*, featuring rockstar pals Lzzy Hale and Taylor Momsen. While details are thin on the ground when it comes to exactly where and when we'll see the arrival of record number eight, we do know that it is in the works, and we think there's a very good chance we'll see it before the end of 2022.

In March last year, singer Maria Brink revealed that the band had taken the enforced downtime of the pandemic to make some much needed upgrades to their working process – and that it meant new music was indeed happening.

"There [are] conversations happening right now and music being made," she told Sirius XM's Trunk Nation. "We had time to finally build music studios in our houses. We have some cool collaborations that we're doing right now, and we are starting to write new music. So, it's definitely happening."

Last autumn, the band were able to take *Mother* on the road for the first time courtesy of a huge run of North American dates, and while they're yet to bring their latest material to European shores, you can only assume it's just a matter of time. Fingers crossed we see Maria and co very soon. Hopefully, we'll have some even newer material to add to the mix by then, too!

BLOODYWOOD: PRESS. IN THIS MOMENT: PRESS/JEREMY SAFFER.

# MACHINE HEAD

## Album #10 and a monstrous UK arena tour incoming!

"I'm not concerned about dropping albums every three years," Robb Flynn told us in 2020. "We take a long time, man. I like the idea of dropping songs out every two to three months and giving fans this constant stream of live music."

It's a philosophy the frontman has certainly been living up to; between 2019 and 2021, Machine Head released eight new songs, either individually or tied together as a small EP, with no full album to show for any of them. With much of Robb's focus seemingly also landing towards continuing the *Burn My Eyes* celebrations once the pandemic was over, it looked unlikely we'd be getting any concrete news on a full-length Machine Head record any time soon. That all changed in November, when the band revealed on social media that they'd been holed up in Oakland beavering away on the follow-up to 2018's *Catharsis*.

"Robb and J-Mac [bassist Jared MacEachern] spent the last week in the Sharkbite Studios with producer Zack Ohren working on their as-yet-untitled 10th album," the post stated, adding that the record was "due in summer" and teasing "great progress on at least six different new songs including a 10 minute-plus epic". Looks like albums are very much back on the menu for Robb, then, and we can't say we're complaining. When you factor in a blockbuster co-headlining arena tour with beloved Viking chums Amon Amarth, 2022 could well be Machine Head's for the taking.

# MEGADETH

## The follow-up to 2016's *Dystopia* album is finally on the way

"I hope so, yeah," was Dave Mustaine's response when we asked him just under two years ago whether we'd see a new Megadeth album by the end of 2020. "We'll start back in a couple of days and keep plowing until it's done… I'm going to get ready and to come back and make a brilliant Megadeth record."

The thrash legend had recently announced (live onstage at Wembley Arena, no less) that he was now cancer-free, and focus was fully turning to the next chapter of his band's legacy. Of course, we all know what happened next, and while some metal heavyweights used 2020's enforced time off to churn out new material or venture into streaming, Dave was seemingly (and understandably!) content to retreat from the frontlines for a bit and tweak the material he'd been working on up until that point.

In autumn last year, Megadeth – minus one David Ellefson, who'd been dumped from the band for, well, *you know* – dusted themselves off for 2021's biggest metal tour alongside Lamb Of God, Trivium and Hatebreed, also revealing in that time that the 16th Megadeth album, *The Sick, The Dying… And The Dead!* would finally be coming in 2022.

"A lot of the riffs have been saved over time," he told *American Songwriter* in November. "A brand new song can be made up of something I wrote when I was 15 or 55. If it's a good riff, I'll save it." Whether they're four months old or 40 years, we're ready for new Megadave riffs.

MACHINE HEAD: PRESS. MEGADETH: PRESS/GREGG MCCABE.

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# THE BEST OF THE REST

## Gojira in arenas! Bring Me on a beach! A load more albums for our ears! Here's everything else we're stoked about for 2022

The floodgates are bursting: with the albums written during isolation emerging, and rescheduled tours and new dates popping up all over the shop, 2022 is set to be a banner year for metal. Here's a glimpse of what's coming your way in the next 12 months...

We thought we'd get a new record from our corpsepainted Norwegian friend **Abbath** last year, but it never materialised. Thankfully, brilliantly titled third album *Dread Reaver* is set for release in March.

**Accept** headline the Friday of new event ManorFest in Towcester in May, plus Overkill, Candlemass, Borknager, Rotting Christ, My Dying Bride and more will be bringing the heavy, too.

Over in Finland, **Amorphis** are readying *Halo* for February – if their single *The Moon*'s anything to go by, it'll be a stunner. One-man industrial/doom project **Author & Punisher** will put out *Krüller* the same month, featuring a guest appearance from Tool drummer Danny Carey and bassist Justin Chancellor, and after a seven-year gap we're expecting something great from death metal stalwarts **Autopsy**.

The last couple of years have been a washout on the travel front, but we're packing our swimmies and sun tan lotion for **Bring Me The Horizon**'s Malta weekender, which also features Bullet For My Valentine, Beartooth, Pvris, Motionless In White, Spiritbox, Nova Twins and Wargasm. Get us on that plane!

**Cancer Bats** might have parted ways with OG guitarist Scott Middleton, but you can't keep the road dogs down, and they've been in the studio working on album number seven. And following up their moving 2019 album, *Final Transmission*, we're predicting something deep and intense from **Cave In** in the spring.

After seeing **Conjurer** absolutely murder Download Pilot and Bloodstock with their thicker-than-treacle grooves, we can't wait for their second record, hopefully in time for more summer fun.

Get the beers in for March, as NOLA's **Crowbar** will release new album *Zero And Below*. Also that month, Swedish legends **Dark Funeral** will unleash the epic-sounding *We Are The Apocalypse*.

Last year saw **Dream Theater** release the ambitious and lofty *A View From The Top Of The World*, and they'll be taking it to UK arenas in April. Meanwhile, you can always rely on **Devildriver** to come up with the goods, and we're predicting the sequel to 2020's *Dealing With Demons I* to appear sometime this year, fittingly titled *Dealing With Demons II*.

At the end of 2021, **Devin Townsend** dropped the pandemic double-combo of *The Puzzle/Snuggles*, but we still have the much-trailed *Lightwork* to come, which he's promised is "crazy heavy on an emotional level". Devin is great and all, but why not **Dying Fetus**? Luckily they're also expected to return with new music. **Evanescence** and **Within Temptation** will finally bring

Gojira: heading our way with Alien Weaponry and Employed

their massive Worlds Collide tour to our arenas in April, and **Fozzy** are set to return with new album *Boombox*, Chris Jericho and friends no doubt bringing gargantuan (right) hooks.

After bagging our Album Of The Year spot, **Gojira** are set to hit our arenas in March with New Zealanders Alien Weaponry and homegrown hardcore heroes Employed To Serve. What a band, what a bill!

Proving there's life after The Dillinger Escape Plan, creative mastermind **Greg Puciato** will release his second solo record, *Mirrorcell*, in spring. Gothenburg's **Hammerfall** are pushing an impressive 30 years as a band, and the none-more-metal *Hammer Of Dawn* is coming your way in February. When it comes to new bands, Church Road's **Heriot** have been making waves, and new music is hotly anticipated in April.

Our tiny brains nearly exploded last year when **Iron Maiden** gave us *Senjutsu*, and this year the mighty Legacy Of The Beast tour will swing by the hallowed Download, where we'll get headlining sets from Kiss and Biffy Clyro, too. Also at Download

fest: Korn, Deftones, Mastodon and a shitload more. Is it June, yet?

Originally commissioned for Roadburn 2020, and recorded between lockdowns, heavy cellist **Jo Quail** will release *The Cartographer* in April and finally perform it at Roadburn 2022. Lamb Of God will close Bloodstock in August before a full UK tour in December 2022, including a stop at London's Brixton Academy.

**Motionless In White** released standalone rager *Timebomb* last summer, but we're expecting a full release sometime soon. Also coming soon is (deep breath) *Resentment Is Always Seismic – A Final Throw Of Throes*, a mini-album from the legendary **Napalm Death**.

Over in the symphonic realm, **Nightwish** will be playing their rescheduled shows at Wembley's SSE Arena in London and Resorts World Arena in Birmingham, and over in death metal land, we reckon it's about time **Obituary** followed up 2017's self-titled record.

## "IT'S CRAZY HEAVY ON AN EMOTIONAL LEVEL"

DEVIN TOWNSEND

**Opeth** are headlining Bristol's ArcTanGent in August, alongside Cult Of Luna. Plus, there's Tesseract, Amenra, Alcest, Perturbator, Leprous, Enslaved, Rivers Of Nihil, A.A. Williams and more. The following weekend, the almighty **Rage Against The Machine** headline Reading & Leeds.

Sheffield post hardcore stars **Rolo Tomassi** will put out *Where Myth Becomes Memory* in February and then embark on a UK tour. **Shinedown** play Download in summer, and we're willing to speculate they might release new music around that time as well. We also reckon **Soulfly** are due another record. Up for it, Max?

The ever-enigmatic **Tool** bring their eye-frying spectacle back to our arenas in May and our favourite Danish rockabilly metallers **Volbeat** will be playing an intimate show at London's 02 Academy Islington in May. It's spooky season all year round for **Wednesday 13**, so we know he'll have a new album out, but like a bat hanging by a thread, it could drop at any moment. Prime yourself for all this, and so much more yet to be revealed. 2022, we're coming for you... H

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THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

# ROB HALFORD

**From co-founding heavy metal, to defining its look, to coming out as a gay musician in the 90s, the Judas Priest frontman is a true trailblazer – and he's even guested in *The Simpsons***

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

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There are many iconic figures in heavy metal, but there's only one Metal God. In a career spanning five decades, Rob Halford has fronted one of the most important and influential metal bands in history, his beloved Judas Priest, and almost single-handedly defined the look and sound that's integral to the genre. He's come a long way since his early days growing up on a housing estate near Walsall in the West Midlands, but his passion and love for metal has not diminished one iota. "I'm a metal singer, that's what I do," he tells us, as he settles down to talk to us from his US home.

Last time we saw Rob in the UK was for Priest's tremendous and emotional headlining set at Bloodstock 2021. "When I was up there onstage at Bloodstock belting it out, I couldn't help but feel grateful and humble for the long life that I've made as a metal singer with a band that I love more than any other band in the world," he smiles. It's this kind of attitude, alongside the spectacular back catalogue he's contributed to, that makes Rob such a star. We got him to reminisce about some of the highlights of a life forged in metal.

**What was your childhood like growing up on a housing estate in Sutton Coldfield?**
"It was a remarkable time. The world was just recovering from World War II; these new housing estates were part of the hope and glory of the UK, actually. Our family were blessed to be able to get into a house, 38 Kelvin Road on the Beechdale Estate near Walsall, it was like a new life that everyone was going through. Going through my school years, becoming a teenager, becoming attached to music, it was a great time for a young person to be alive. As you get older though, that's when you start to look outside of your circle, and I was very determined. I loved Walsall, but I wanted to see more of my own country. When you went down to London in those days, it was a big day out!"

**What was the first music that inspired you?**
"The first music that shook me up was my Aunt Pat giving me a record player and some records, Elvis and Bill Haley And The Comets. I heard this music and I thought, 'My goodness! What is this?!' It was mind-blowing. That was my first comprehension that music has this ability to do things to you as a person. Then I grew up with The Beatles and The Stones and The Who and all those great bands. It was a great opportunity in those days to get into music as it was getting louder! That was when the heaviness started to kick in; I saw Jimi Hendrix cranking out those riffs at the Isle of Wight Festival [in 1970] and that was it for me. Destiny was calling."

**Heavy metal was barely even part of music's terminology when Priest got started. What was it like for you in the early days of metal?**
"The first thing we did was embrace this term, 'heavy metal'. We'd get asked and we'd say, 'We are a heavy metal band.' There weren't many places to look at, to judge, or level yourselves with. But you have to hone down who you are with the instruments you've got – finding your own character is vitally important. We knew there was enough distinction in the sounds that we were making to know that we were pulling away from everyone else. People were saying, 'There's this band, Judas Priest, they're doing stuff we've never heard before, with screaming vocals and pummelling riffs', and this was before the image was even fully formed."

**"I'VE NEVER LISTENED TO THE TIM OWENS JUDAS PRIEST ALBUMS"**

**1980 was an unbelievable year for metal. Priest released *British Steel* alongside *Ace Of Spades, Iron Maiden, Back In Black, Heaven And Hell, Blizzard Of Ozz* – so many classics of the genre. What was that year like for you?**
"So exciting. The 80s was a decade of decadence, and the mix of heavy metal from Judas Priest to Mötley Crüe was amazing. For us to make a record that went on to be a standard bearer was such a big moment, it stands alone; we've never made another record like it and we never will. The industry was thriving; we'd sell half a million records in a week in the US alone! There was this sense of economic security for a lot of people, so shows were selling out and they were buying t-shirts and records, cassettes, all this crazy excitement… you just got caught up in it all."

**Speaking of the 80s, Live Aid in 1985 was a once-in-a-lifetime event, with simultaneous concerts in London and Philadelphia, and you guys and Sabbath were the only bands representing metal that day…**
"…And we both played Philadelphia! Ironic, isn't it? There were no metal bands at Wembley that day, how mad is that?! Bill Curbishley was managing us, and they said they wanted The Who. Bill turned around and said, 'OK, but you're also having Judas Priest.' Bob Geldof knew us, so that was fine. But the fact that you had two of the prominent British heavy metal bands playing a stadium in America and being beamed around the world, it was another milestone for metal. We were being heard in some people's living rooms for the very first time! I spent most of the day with the punters out the front, banging my head and screaming, 'Madonna! Mick! Planty! Jimmy!' – it was one great talent after the next. It was a once-in-a-lifetime event, and I was there. I was there, man!"

**What sort of mindset were you in when you left Priest in 1992?**
"Let me start by saying I'm not the first lead singer to leave a band. I call it LSD: Lead Singer's Disease. I always have to emphasise that it was a classic case of communication breakdown. After the Painkiller tour we were like dead dogs, we were exhausted. I'd said years before that at some point I might want to wander off and do something different and they'd all given me their blessing. It wasn't cunning, or unexpected, it was just the way things went."

**And you made some great music in that period away from the band, too.**
"I think so. I did Fight and Halford, which was very much my bridge back into the band. I think I was really able to use that time to try new things, to make sense of my life, and to work out what it was that I really needed in my life, and that thing was Priest. I learned a lot about my own abilities as a writer, I did all the music and the demos for [Fight's debut album] *War Of Words* and got us a record deal, went around the world a few times. I look back at that time mostly with fondness."

**Did you ever listen to Priest when Tim 'Ripper' Owens was in the band?**
"It's cool to ask me this question, and I have an honest answer: I've never listened to *Jugulator* and I've never listened to *Demolition*. Not that I've avoided listening to them; the fact is that I wasn't in the band, Tim is a great singer and a good friend of mine, but I wasn't drawn to Priest at that time of my life."

**It was around this time that you came out. When was the first time you became aware of your sexuality?**
"My earliest memories were when I was a little kid, I can't put a date on it, but it was pre-teens; I just felt more

The Metal God: all hail!

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comfortable [with] and more attracted to guys. As I went through, as we all do, trying to figure stuff out, I played around with boys and girls. That was a sad and confusing time for a young person back then – two men who were caught in a toilet together, because there were no clubs and it was the only place they could do that, were thrown in jail. They were looked at as sordid little stories in the *News Of The World*, so you start to question yourself: 'What's wrong with me? Am I a freak?', because you hear people saying you should be locked up for it. As a young person, it does your head in! You have to learn to deal with all of that."

**How did you deal with it when you were older?**
"Even in the band, I requested that that side of my life didn't get into the press. In case it damaged the band's reputation. I was living all of that even as an adult, until that famous day on MTV [in 1998] when I came out and threw off those shackles. It's cool that you asked this question, because we've just had National Coming Out Day, and it's beautiful to step out and live your life totally on your terms."

**Do you feel metal is more inclusive these days than it was previously?**
"I do. We are inclusive, we are open to anybody. It was bad enough when metal first happened and people on the outside were going, 'This sucks, it's not real music!', so as a community we've always protected our music. That idea, I think, extends to whatever your religion is, your race is, or your sexuality is – that all falls away and we are just free to live our own lives. This is a question that I will never stop talking about. It's important to young gay metalheads who are seeking out their identity – we want equality across the board and we deserve it."

**You must take great pride in being such an inspiration to so many people.**
"Yeah, I have never really been a spokesperson for that world, I just do my thing and sometimes your actions speak louder than your words. When I stand onstage in Russia, because they are discriminated against so much over there, or any country where that discrimination is more common, it's a win. There are many more articulate people than me, but I do my bit as an openly gay heavy metal singer, and it's a blessing to get these messages back from people."

**Tell us about rejoining Priest in 2003…**
"I was living in San Diego at the time, and I really missed the band, so I went ▶

Judas Priest. Note: not death metal

to a coffee shop, bought a cup of coffee, sat outside with some blue paper and a blue envelope, and poured my heart out into what was six, seven or eight pages of where I was at and what I was feeling. How much I missed the band, you know. It was a really intimate and personal letter. So, I sent that off to Trinifold, our management people, and just let it go. I thought, 'Let's see what happens', but at least I had got it out of my soul, out of my system. It's really damaging if you hold things in."

**What happened next?**
"I found out later that this was all part of the journey back, because the guys all read the letter and they said, 'Let's do it.' I remember being in my kitchen in Walsall, for the *Metalogy* box set, with [manager] Jayne Andrews, Ken [K.K. Downing, then-guitarist] was there, Ian [Hill, bassist] was there… Glenn [Tipton, guitarist] must have been there as well, I'm sure. We talked about this song, and that song, and the artwork, and blah, blah, blah, and the final question was: 'So… are you coming back?' 'Yeah, I'm back.' 'OK, good.' And everybody left! And I was just left in my kitchen going, 'Gosh! I'm back in Priest!', which is so… it was so British, you know? You know how blokes can be… 'Don't make a fuss' – it was so blokey! But it was beautiful.

## "NANCY CARTWRIGHT TOLD ME SHE WAS A PRIEST FAN, IN BART'S VOICE!"

I felt like I just wanted to go out into the streets in Walsall and scream, 'I'm back in Priest! I'm back in Priest!' For me it was a very emotional thing. That's how it is in bands, you're like family, but I was back and the rest is history!"

**It's pretty incredible that you were immortalised in *The Simpsons* in 2014, isn't it?**
"Yes! It just goes to show how Priest have been adopted as part of the fabric of the United States, it's a win for the UK metal world. The big thrill for me was going to the read-through. I'm in the room with all the voice actors and I was so excited: 'There's Homer! There's Lisa! There's Bart!' Nancy Cartwright, who does the voice of Bart, came running up to me and said, 'I can't believe it, I'm such a Priest fan!' And she did it in a Bart voice! It was freaky, a really special day!"

**They called you a death metal band, though…**
"Ha ha ha! It was funny, because the next week the intro had Bart writing on the board: 'Judas Priest is not death metal.' It was really sweet of them to do that, they acknowledged there was a hiccup and they put it right. But it's amazing to be immortalised in yellow."

**You're celebrating 50 years of Priest. How do you feel about that milestone?**
"I'm just proud, that's the word. Really proud of what we've done as a band. What we've done for British metal, for metal worldwide. To be there from the very beginning is extraordinary. You don't get to see that much. You don't get to see the band that was the first blues band, or the band that was the first jazz band, you can't see the first classical musician – they're all gone. But you can see Judas Priest and go, 'They are some of the guys who started this genre', you know? That's a tremendous feeling of pride and satisfaction."

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# THE OTHER SIDE

**Armed with a new name and major label backing, gothic heavy metallers Unto Others are set to explode. But are they ready for the limelight?**

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURES: PETER BESTE

Unto Others (left to right):
Brandon Hill, Sebastian Silva,
Gabriel Franco, Colin Vranizan

For a man who's rapidly become the figurehead for the goth and post-punk revival that's been creeping ever deeper into the metal underground, Unto Others frontman Gabriel Franco is far from the arch, cryptic creature of the night you might expect. Sitting in his Portland study and talking to *Hammer* over Zoom, he's good-natured and utterly unpretentious, but you can sense a restlessness, too. After all the uncontainable, grassroots buzz and critical acclaim that greeted their 2019 debut album, *Mana* – released under their former name, Idle Hands – leading to a tour supporting King Diamond and becoming Roadrunner labelmates with Slipknot, Trivium and Gojira, he's clearly still trying to figure out the round hole he's found himself fitting into.

"I'm extremely cynical," he says, "so my first thought when we were getting all this attention was, 'Oh god, are we the new hype band? Because if we are, how long will this last?' So the more popular we've gotten, the more pressure there is for me to not fuck it up."

Gabriel needn't worry. For a start, the extreme and retro metal scenes he came out of don't give out their laurels lightly, their few breakout bands charged with carrying committed, anti-opportunistic ideals to the wider world. Plus, the post-punk and goth DNA injected into the underground stems from two fiercely independent bands, Sweden's In Solitude and Finland's Beastmilk (now Grave Pleasures), whose respective late-2013 albums, *Sister* and *Climax*, laid the ground for a host of bands to follow in their wake. German black metallers Secrets Of The Moon, hardcore punks Okkultokrati and atmospheric Icelanders Kontinuum were just some of the artists paying attention.

But if the aftermath of In Solitude and Beastmilk's rekindling of the early 80s has hovered just under the radar of the wider metal scene, it's Unto Others who are turning that skeletal drumbeat into a rallying cry. Their seamless fusion of haunted yet driving gothic grooves and barnstorming, classic metal anthems hasn't just hit a contemporary nerve, but all manner of pleasure centres around it, turning familiar sources into something revelatory and instantly galvanising.

"In Portland, the response was extremely positive from the start," says Gabriel. "I'm sure some people talked shit about us, but it wasn't *cool* to talk shit about us. It was also regular metal dudes coming up to us at gigs, like Lamb Of God fans. At the same time, I don't trust a lot of people right off the bat. I'm always cordial, but a lot of the time I'm like, 'OK, what's your fucking angle, man?' That was a joke in the old bands I used to play in. Someone would come up and say, 'Hey great set, man', and to each other we'd be like, 'What's their fucking angle?' Ha ha ha!"

Bands as instantly celebrated as Unto Others don't tend to arrive out of nowhere. Gabriel had cut his teeth in a black metal band in his teens and then more traditional speed/power metal bands, Spellcaster and Silver Talon, before frustration forced his hand to break out and start something different

"The local scene at the time was definitely something I was reacting against, especially as I got into my mid- to late-20s," says Gabriel. "The traditional and black metal fanbase here is really cool, but it seemed like a lot of people wanted to start throwback bands and pigeonhole themselves. With Silver Talon, I thought, 'I'm still not doing this the way I want to, so I've got to leave this and start my own thing.' So I definitely had a chip on my shoulder for 10 years in defiance of everything around me."

The then-Idle Hands, formed in 2017, didn't start off with a specific mission statement. As Gabriel puts it, "I did notice the shift to gothiness in the scene after the Beastmilk

Goth: the next step

album. I tried to keep our music grounded in heavy metal, because that's eternal, but then goth has been around for a long fucking time. I was never dead set on any specific sound, I was just willing to work with people as long as they were willing to work with me. The only *really* goth band I really liked at the time was The Sisters Of Mercy, but I fucking loved them. In Portland there used to be a place called Lovecraft Bar; it was a goth, metal place – but more goth than metal – and it was always packed. I think it had an effect on the scene. The punks and the metal dudes would fall back into that place, because, hey, you can dance to that shit!"

If the Lovecraft Bar had some bearing on the band's sound, the idea of mixing cultures was nothing new to Gabriel. Born to an American mother and Mexican father, who divorced when Gabriel was young, he grew up with a Vietnamese stepdad, all the different influences forming part of his upbringing.

"It was very colourful, very cool and vibrant," says Gabriel. "I'm also one of six brothers, so I was always fighting for attention. You could probably dive into my childhood past and figure out why I do what I do."

# “I THOUGHT, ‘OH GOD, ARE WE THE NEW HYPE BAND?’”

GABRIEL FRANCO

As fast as Unto Others have risen, the path hasn’t been without obstacles. After signing with Roadrunner as Idle Hands, they discovered another band with the same name: a “blues band, they play farmers’ markets”, and who were also determinedly litigious. Coming to terms with the resultant name change wasn’t easy.

“It was devastating,” Gabriel admits. “It was precisely the stages of grief starting with denial. I just ignored it for months. We had to come to terms with the fact that we couldn’t keep the name, and I have a list of all the stupid-ass ideas that I tossed in the trash can, but ‘Unto Others’ was the most in keeping with what we were doing. I felt like it had the same biblical impact, the same metal and goth undertones to it. I’ve always thought about what I’m

BOX: GETTY. PRESS.

## A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT

### Three 80 bands that inspired Unto Others

### JUDAS PRIEST

“I love *The Ripper* [from 1976’s *Sad Wings Of Destiny*]. It almost transcends Priest. This song is so wacky and weird and awesome and perfect. I’ve always wanted to write a song like that. And then on *Epitaph*, Halford’s singing about an old man dying and not doing anything with his life. I really identify with that. Our song *Don’t Waste Your Time* is about that too. It’s a fear of looking back and thinking of what you never achieved.”

### THE SMITHS

“When I was young, *Handsome Devil* was in a skate video, and I always thought that was the coolest song. But what drew me back to them as an adult was I listened to *Please, Please, Please Let Me Get What I Want*, and I was like, ‘Oh my god, these lyrics are so fucking cornball, but this is exactly how you feel when you’re 17.’ Because the world’s not about you, motherfucker! There are other lyrics, *‘If a 10-ton truck crashes into us... To die by your side’*, that are so over the top that you can’t help but laugh. Why do people laugh at jokes? Because they’re true. I identify with the honesty behind it.”

### SUICIDAL TENDENCIES

“I’ve always identified with the punk rock side. When I was growing up we’d skateboard around the city, go to parks and drink 40s [40-ounce bottles of beer]. ST represented that lifestyle to me. I also like the empowerment in the messages, the hardcore aspect that you can’t bring me down.”

There's definitely no mistaking these guys for a farmers' market-playing blues band

doing and what I'm writing in the context of the name of our band, and I did have to slightly shift that. Whereas Idle Hands was more of a gothy, almost halloween-y cemetery feel, this one is a bit more blunt. I feel this one is more metal than goth, if that makes sense. And I think it does affect the music."

As much as the band's recently released second album, *Strength*, is awash with breathless, towering bangers such as opener *Heroin*, it resonates far beyond being just a meticulously measured genre mash-up. For all the added references to the Misfits and even The Smiths, *Strength* is a deeply personal album. It tunes into the exhaustion, the feelings of being left behind, the stubborn holding on to the residue of dreams that's defined our Covid age and gives them a dramatic weight, making an epic, forlornly noble stand.

"I do think there's a definite shift from the first to the second record," admits Gabriel. "Whereas *Mana* was fun and dark, this one is more bleak. While we were recording *Strength* there was a sense of being lost in a tunnel of darkness, and having no clue when you are going to get out. You still have the hooks, you still have the melodies, but especially lyrically, the album just feels a bit more depressive and hopeless."

**"I DON'T WANT TO FAIL MY BANDMATES"**

GABRIEL FRANCO

What was that reflecting?

"Just specifically the times we were in. There was so much stress going on in 2020, not just for the obvious reason of Covid, but also not just having any clue of when live music was coming back. I knew *Strength* was coming out on a larger label. I feel with *Mana* we were on the rise, there was a positive atmosphere, and now you're being dragged down into the real world. I feel responsible for my bandmates, like I don't want to fail them and they all have to go back to their day jobs. So it was written under a lot of pressure. It's why the title works so well for the album; it's what I was searching for to get to the other side."

Gabriel may be unguardedly candid about the making of the album, but it's his capacity for self-reflection that gives *Strength* such depth. As with *Climax*, it's an album you can party to, but one that takes on added adrenaline from its keenly anxious edge.

"We need to maintain our own identity, and the way that I do that is by being honest," Gabriel says. "I have these influences and I have these bands I love, but I run them through my own emotions and then I put it on the record. People want something authentic in music, something that they can connect with. I figured as long as I can stay honest with myself and the music, the end product will do that."

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# THE REVIEWS

# 101 ARCHITECTS

**Brighton’s metalcore masters orchestrate an emotional rollercoaster at Abbey Road**


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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURES: ED MASON

Confess: plenty to be angry about

# CONFESS

## *Revenge At All Costs*

REXIUS

*Iranian thrashers rage against the oppressive Middle Eastern machine*

***REVENGE AT ALL*** *Costs* fizzles to life with the sound of TV static and news snippets. Admittedly, such an opening has become a cliché, especially in thrash metal circles, but postpone your eye-rolls. The sampled reports aren't studio-created facsimiles to make Confess sound more seismic than they actually are; they're all real pieces of global coverage, documenting the seven years of hell that led up to the Iranians' third album.

Just days after the release of Confess's last full-length, 2015's *In Pursuit Of Dreams*, core members Nikan Khosravi and Arash Ilkhani were arrested in their home country. Their only crime was making anti-establishment, bullheaded metal, for which they were put on trial on charges of blasphemy and propaganda against the state. They endured solitary confinement and interrogations, followed by 18 months in jail before fleeing to Norway and seeking asylum. There they've reactivated the band with a new, five-piece line-up.

As you might expect, Confess sound fucking pissed off. Of course, they were never exactly mushy to begin with, what with singer/guitarist Nikan being an acolyte of Slipknot and Slayer since he was 13. Debut album *Beginning Of Dominion* was a guitar-governed blitzkrieg, but it also found space for NWOBHM-inspired flamboyance. There's none of that levity here; *Revenge At All Costs* is a groove/thrash attack that adds a lethal venom to Confess's bite.

First track proper *Evin* constructs a strong foundation, picking up where Sepultura left off in the mid-90s. The creeping, isolated chords at the outset – produced to carry the

**"*REVENGE AT ALL COSTS* WILL BE A HOTLY DISCUSSED PILLAR OF 2022 METAL"**

CAMILLA NORVOLL/PRESS

perfect amount of crunch – create an unshakable *Slave New World* vibe. Even Nikan's growled ranting has all the passion and punch of Max Cavalera's, especially in the animalistic roars that preempt the first breakdown.

Fortunately, the album is quick to escape the shadow of its forebears. Nikan's playing isn't just flawless; songs like *Hegemony* quickly reveal the full range of the frontman's fingers. The gaps between booming chords are plugged by athletic shreds, while the likes of *Under Surveillance* and *Phoenix Rises* chug through innumerable low E notes. On *Ransom Note*, strings are bent into squealing anguish, but their wailing only underscores the force of the abrupt, fast-paced drumming.

Despite all the unfettered rage, *Revenge At All Costs* still somehow peaks at its very end. The penultimate track, *Army Of Pigs!* builds a chorus out of call-and-response shouts ripped straight from the grottiest of hardcore punk basement gigs. Then, lastly, *I Speak Hate* introduces robotic clean vocals to flank all the shouting anarchy.

For such a rampage of an album to still be pulling new tricks all the way to the finish line is an even louder testament to Confess's talents than any one of their seething riffs. Inevitably, *Revenge At All Cost*'s traumatic backstory will make it a hotly discussed pillar of 2022 metal, but its power and quietly inventive songwriting deserve just as much attention.

**FOR FANS OF: Sepultura, Fear Factory, Testament**

MATT MILLS

## 40 WATT SUN
### *Perfect Light*
SVART/CAPPIO

*Melancholy's master poets return to commiserate*

A lot has happened since 40 Watt Sun's last album, and the vast majority of it has been horrifying. Fortunately, Patrick Walker's elegant musical vision has survived the onslaught, and *Perfect Light* is the, erm, perfect record to help us through another cold and bitter winter. Even more sparse and vulnerable than on 2016's *Wider than the Sky*, the trio's new songs are uniformly beautiful and heart-rending, as Walker lays his soul bare across the warmest of backdrops. In particular, opener *Reveal* is a wickedly affecting love song with a bruised heart, while *A Thousand Miles* wrings hope from despair, and a gently undulating post-rock folk mantra from the most pure and delicate of musical ideas.

**FOR FANS OF: Red House Painters, Warning, Steve Von Till**

DOM LAWSON

## ASSIMILATE
### *Suffer In Silence*
SELF-RELEASED

*Hertfordshire alt-rockers wring purpose from the pandemic*

Assimilate's 2018 debut, *Vicious Circles*, caused quite a stir. Recorded over the pandemic, the follow-up sees the alt-rockers consolidate their sound while moving into more ambitious, grandiose territory. There's plenty to admire here, from the hard-hitting lyrics that centre around isolation and mental health to the boisterous riffs on the likes of *Deathwish* and *Blood Hands* that already sound made for large academy venues. There's huge potential here; the future may still look uncertain, but the chances of *Suffer In Silence* becoming a breakout record are far less so.

**FOR FANS OF: Bullet For My Valentine, Shinedown, Those Damn Crows**

ELLIOT LEAVER

## BEKËTH NEXËHMÜ
### *De Fornas Likgaldrar*
PURITY THROUGH FIRE

*Elongated, elevated horror from Swedish black metal masters*

The fiery blasts of Sweden's Bekëth Nexëhmü are borne on grandiose updraughts of synth – the devil's clarion call. Opener *Sjalslig Urvilja* is a relentless battery of double bass and tumbling fills, with mastermind Swartadauþuzis unleashing an impassive, distant rasp. Given its exhausting intensity, the remainder of this two-hour double album – their third in 10 years, alongside several celebrated demos – is an intimidating prospect. The slow burn of *Det Isande Kallet* offers some respite, with the remainder of disc one comprised of 'shorter' tracks of approximately 10 furious minutes apiece. Disc two's tracks are nearer the 15-20-minute mark, allowing for an expanded narrative scope. Uplifting and horrifying, these engrossing realms affirm why Bekëth Nexëhmü are regularly spoken of with such reverence.

**FOR FANS OF: The Ruins Of Beverast, Paysage D'Hiver, Mysticum**

TOM O'BOYLE

Battle Beast go on a Eurometal ram-page

# BATTLE BEAST

## *Circus Of Doom*

NUCLEAR BLAST

*Finland's power-hungry metallers fight off the winter blues*

**EVER SINCE BATTLE** Beast's principal songwriter, Anton Kabanen, jumped ship in 2015, the band he left behind have, in a surprise twist, gone from strength to strength. While the early material penned by Anton – an incendiary take on 80s Euro-power metal brimming with big choruses and catchy riffs – was infectious, Battle Beast's more recent platter of polished crowdpleasers have guided them toward the big time. Their triumphant renaissance, coupled with the near-celebrity status of their lung-busting vocalist Noora Louhimo, is just the fuel that Battle Beast need to launch yet another album of pristine symphonic sounds in 2022.

*Circus Of Doom* is filled to the brim with epic metal that fires on all cylinders. The eponymous opening track is classic Battle Beast, and then some. Thundering into the spotlight with the sort of iron-clad grooves that wouldn't be out of place on a Lamb Of God album, then topped with Turisas-esque bombast and expertly penned vocal hooks, this first taste is a tremendous start to the album. No stranger to repurposing retro sounds, Battle Beast plunder the book of power metal tropes throughout the rest of *Circus Of Doom*, bolstered by plenty of showy synth courtesy of Janne Björkroth. Some tracks, like lead single *Master Of Illusion*, hit a home run, harnessing Battle Beast's cinematic escapism like an *Eye Of The Tiger* for the power metal generation. The same vibe can be felt on *The Road To Avalon*, pulsating with flecks of Dragonforce and Bonnie Tyler while *Eye Of The Storm*, an admittedly brazen repurposing of Nightwish, is fortified by Noora's towering vocal brilliance. Even gratuitously cheesy moments like *Russian Roulette*, which drips with disco synth and fiery riffs, is so over-the-top it's irresistible. After the years we've had, this is just the shot of exhilaration the world needs.

**FOR FANS OF:** Amaranthe, Dragonforce, Sonata Arctica

HOLLY WRIGHT

## BEYOND DEATH'S THRONE

### *Haphazard Ethos*

SIGNAL REX

*Spanish black metallers take the muscular route to transcendence*

Black metal's urge to tear through the veil separating the tangible world from the beyond has led to some of its most mind-warping quantum leaps, be it Emperor, Deathspell Omega or Blut Aus Nord. If this Spanish duo are driven by the same impulses, their debut mini-LP isn't a psychedelic unleashing of forces so much as a fevered, muscular attempt to contain them. *Haphazard Ethos* marshals a host of classic and contemporary BM tropes with palpable conviction, from wraith-swirl synths to the bug-eyed physicality of Misþyrming and Watain's baleful, bracing, twilit atmospheres. It's all drawn into a reverb-drenched whorl, like a portal from which extradimensional demons are about to pour out. An engrossing if familiar act of deliverance.

**FOR FANS OF:** Watain, Wode, Svartidauði

JONATHAN SELZER

## BIG SCENIC NOWHERE

### *The Long Morrow*

HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

*Desert rock paladins embrace their inner Carlos Castaneda*

Founded in 2019, this new band with an old soul was born out of an ambition to build something fresh and exciting using decades' worth of friendship as fuel. Featuring members of desert rock royalty Fu Manchu, Yawning Man and Mos Generator, Big Scenic Nowhere's 2020 debut, *Vision Beyond Horizon*, certainly lived up to its pedigree and now the four-piece raise the bar once again. Embracing a proggier, space rock sound, tracks like *Defector (Of Future Days)* and *Lavender Bleu* brim with velvety vocals, spiralling riffs and hooks that'll stay embedded in your cranium for months. The labyrinthine title track, features ex-members of Opeth and Tin Machine, and is an undeniable show-stopper.

**FOR FANS OF:** Fu Manchu, Yawning Man, Mos Generator

EDWIN McFEE

## BREATHS

### *Though Life Has Turned Out Like Nothing I Could Have Imagined, It Is Far Better Than I Could Have Dreamt*

SELF-RELEASED

*Solo post-black metal project finds affirmation in the forests*

Jason Roberts' solo post-black metal project could easily get lost among the increasing number of artists who cite both Darkthrone and Slowdive as influences. There's enough here to distinguish Breaths from their peers, though; album highlight *The Matriarch* melds the frostiest BM with Deftones at their most gorgeous, with sweeping chords and haunting vocals before we get a touch of trip hop at the climax. Though *Life...* often leans in slightly too much on the scene's tropes, at his widest stretch, Roberts achieves his finest results.

**FOR FANS OF:** Palms, Møl, Alcest

STEPHEN HILL

TERHI YLIMÄINEN/PRESS

## CELESTE
### *Assassine(s)*
NUCLEAR BLAST

*Gallic post-black/sludge voyagers hit an unpredictable pinnacle*

Formed in 2005, Celeste remain an important part of France's avant-metal firmament. On this seventh record, the band embrace the staccato chunk of their hardcore roots while experimenting with style and structure. Their melding of black/post/sludge with an increasing melodic sensibility makes for a multi-faceted approach. *Des Torrents De Coups* is a slow-burn black metal-inspired intro that bleeds into the bombastic chug of *De Tes Yeux Bleus Perlés*. The sonorous post-metal of *Elle Se Répète Froidement* is fraught with baleful recrimination, building to multi-faceted, eight-minute closer *Le Coeur Noir Charbon*. Compelling by virtue of its unpredictability, *Assassine(s)* has allowed each musician to explore individual freedom of expression in their pandemic isolation. The result exceeds the sum of its parts.

**FOR FANS OF:** Alcest, Regarde Les Hommes Tomber, Wiegedood

TOM O'BOYLE

## DESCENT
### *Order Of Chaos*
BRILLIANT EMPEROR

*Aussie extremists take the scenic route into the inferno*

With apocalyptic, classical artwork to match, *Order Of Chaos* lives up to the band's moniker as it channels Dante and travels down the proverbial spiral into the Seven Circles. Starting off with *Tempest*'s hostile modern death metal and the menacing *Dragged*, with its earthy rumble and riffs scavenged from a gore-soaked massacre, the album ends with a black metal summoning of the endtimes. It also helps that mixer Kurt Ballou has a gift for capturing that buzzsaw, Entombed tone so beloved by legions of followers. Slower and more ominous than its predecessor, the Australians' second effort veers between the debilitating squall of *Fester* and the purposeful groove of *Resolve*. Having taken on the influence of Stockholm, Bergen and Florida, alongside a hardcore cudgel and a vocalist able to gargle warm acid, Descent offer up a grisly celebration of all things extreme.

**FOR FANS OF:** Vitriol, Trap Them, Gatekeeper

ADAM REES

## DEVIL IN ME
### *On The Grind*
DEAD SERIOUS RECORDINGS

*Portugal's hardcore harriers make merry with the masters*

This Portugese five-piece hardcore band have four albums to their name and have earned support from Comeback Kid's Andrew Neufeld, who produced their third album, *The End*, and Madball's Freddy Cricien, who guested on the single, *War*. It's now been seven years since their last release, and they've added a new guitar player and more bite and aggression to their sound, all to a truly fantastic end. Solid production helps their gruff vocals land hard, and their solos pop as they neatly bridge modern melodic metal and classic NYHC. Strong, memorable songwriting, effective gang shouts, and a guest appearance by Terror's Scott Vogel round things off nicely. 2022 will see them embark on a European tour with Comeback Kid and this album should make for some seriously happy pits.

**FOR FANS OF:** Sick Of It All, Terror, Comeback Kid

NIK YOUNG

## EARTHLESS
### *Night Parade Of One Hundred Demons*
NUCLEAR BLAST

*San Diego's celebrated psych rockers raise the spirits*

Wrapped in a terrifying cover that calls to mind the work of horror comic artist Kelley Jones, the contents of Earthless's sixth full-length are just as striking. Inspired by an ancient Japanese legend in which an army of ghouls make sleeping villages across the land their playground once a year, *Night Parade Of One Hundred Demons* is the San Diego trio's darkest, densest and most chilling record to date. After flirting with vocals and shorter songs for 2018's curveball *Black Heaven*, their latest effort sees them return to their roots and comprises three mammoth instrumental tracks, which weigh in at around 20 minutes each. Drummer – and Rocket From The Crypt member – Mario Rubalcaba steers the ship with ease as the band draw on psych, krautrock and classic rock influences, and whammy bar-loving guitarist Isaiah Mitchell is in godlike form throughout.

**FOR FANS OF:** Nebula, Rocket From The Crypt, Brant Bjork

EDWIN MCFEE

Comeback Kid get some perspective on their early sound

## COMEBACK KID
### *Heavy Steps*
NUCLEAR BLAST

*Canada's hardcore punk standard-bearers go back to basics*

COMING FIVE YEARS after the divisive and slightly more experimental *Outsider* album, Canadian punk legends Comeback Kid appear to have re-evaluated their sound and decided that, actually, writing big anthemic slabs of melodic hardcore is very much where their bread is buttered. *Heavy Steps* is definitely a far more recognisably Comeback Kid-sounding record than its predecessor. And whilst some artists going back to their core sound can be an admittance that they've run out of ideas, here it just feels like the band are playing very much to their strengths by giving us something familiar.

There aren't many bands that are quite as adept at creating breakneck-paced bangers with crunching metallic punk riffs and the kind of choruses that demand to be roared at the sky by the listener from the very first play. When the title track kicks off it sets a bar that would be incredibly difficult for most bands to scale; it's a beauty in all its two-stepping, circle-pitting, throat-shredding glory. But then you get Gojira's Joe Duplantier lending his monstrous vocals and guitar tone on *Crossed* only three songs later and raising the bar again.

Admittedly, due to Comeback Kid being happy to (expertly) pin down one particular style, this probably won't convert longtime fence-sitters, and, save for the odd flashy guitar solo or the kind of slick grooves heard on *Dead On The Fence*, this isn't the most dynamically challenging record that 2022 will throw up. That hardly matters, though, because when the band lock down that mixture of blurring pace and skyscraper hooks, such as on a song like *Standstill*, they just feel absolutely, gloriously infectious. *Heavy Steps* is a record that disproves the notion that you can have too much of a good thing.

**FOR FANS OF:** Strike Anywhere, Stick To Your Guns, Ignite

STEPHEN HILL

PRESS

# FIT FOR AN AUTOPSY

## *Oh What The Future Holds*

NUCLEAR BLAST

*New Jersey's deathcore destroyers unleash a modern classic*

**FIT FOR AN** Autopsy started peeling away from the rest of the pack on 2015's *Absolute Hope Absolute Hell*. That album was their first to feature current vocalist Joe Badolato, and saw the New Jersey innovators, led by esteemed guitarist-producer, Will Putney, stretch the boundaries of deathcore, incorporating melodic textures, technical virtuosity, and emotive themes into their slam attack. They took that growth to even further heights on 2017's *The Great Collapse* and 2019's excellent *The Sea Of Tragic Beasts*. So, with the gauntlet laid down and a standard set that's way beyond the capabilities of many of their contemporaries, the expectations going into the band's sixth album are vertiginous.

*Oh What The Future Holds* surpasses them all. First single *Far From Heaven* set the scope months ago, escalating from an expansive, Gojira-influenced build-up and a murmured clean vocal into a storm of ominous riffs and monstrous groove. It was followed by *Pandora*, an onslaught of triple-guitar Gothenburg riffery that saw Joe, by now cemented as one of the most diverse, intense vocalists in the game, unleashing hell on the rich who unceasingly shaft the rest of the planet (*'It's never "too many graves". It's always "not enough shovels"'* and *'A world driven by extinction, only ends in extinction'*). It was completed by an almost serene solo and a filth-encrusted breakdown tighter than a gnat's arse.

The rest of the album follows suit, shifting and twisting, never falling into repose. From *Savages*' ironclad technicality, and *Conditional Healing*'s nefarious intent, to the serpentine closer, *The Man That I Was Not*, every track sets a benchmark for modern barbarity. On *Oh What The Future Holds*, Fit For An Autopsy are in career-defining form, gleefully taking the reinvention of their previous releases to a dark, emotional, thought-provoking and crushing culmination. It's their most accomplished album yet.

**FOR FANS OF:** **Gojira, Lorna Shore, Thy Art Is Murder**

DANNII LEIVERS

## ENTERPRISE EARTH

### *The Chosen*

MNRK HEAVY

*Washington heavies embark on a bruising deathcore odyssey*

This Washington deathcore mob have pushed the boat out with their fourth album. How many other releases from this scene are over an hour in length? They're good value for it, though; a furious barrage of riffs and blastbeats pummel their way through 14 songs, interspersed with two interludes that help break the album down into three more digestible 'acts'. There are plenty of melodic moments that showcase the band's creative depth and versatility, not least *Overpass* and the eight-minute-plus title track. It's a long, but remarkably consistent album that will make for a bruising, yet engrossing experience.

**FOR FANS OF:** **The Black Dahlia Murder, Thy Art Is Murder, Whitechapel**

ELLIOT LEAVER

## FEUERSCHWANZ

### *Memento Mori*

NAPALM

*Teutonic folk metallers abandon the taverns for the battlefields*

In the 17 years since Feuerschwanz emerged as a trashy, gimmicky folk metal band (their second album was called *Met & Miezen*, translation: 'Mead & Pussies') the Germans have transformed into a band worth talking about. Over time, they've discarded the 'comedy' for an increasingly metal melée. *Memento Mori* is an album of fun, catchy jigs, battle cries and shanties. Just two listens to power anthem *Untot Im Drachenboot* and the grog-soaked title track, and you'll be stuck with them all day. By the time *Rohirrim* (as in the Riders of Rohan) incorporates the score for *The Lord Of The Rings* into its thundering solo moment, you'll be itching to gallop off to the nearest battlefield.

**FOR FANS OF:** **Powerwolf, Sabaton, Ensiferum**

DANNII LEIVERS

## GILMORE TRAIL

### *Impermanence*

CHASMATE

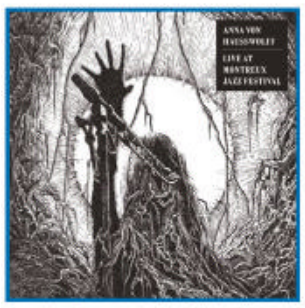
*UK post-rockers still in search of fresh sonic pastures*

Creating a distinct, attributable sound is a monumental task for any band, and that challenge is increased exponentially when you're operating within purely instrumental parameters. Sheffield quartet Gilmore Trail are well-versed in all the tricks of the post-rock trade and replicate them with considerable skill, but three full-length albums into their career, they've yet to find their own spin on the genre. That said, there are a few standout moments, such as the steadily increasing tempo on *The Zone Of Silence*, which breaks out into an unexpected blastbeat, and the combination of saxophone, glockenspiel and e-bow on album highlight *Echoes Of Solitude* is awe-inspiring. Overall, *Impermanence* is a solid instrumental rock album, albeit not an entirely spectacular one.

**FOR FANS OF:** **This Will Destroy You, Red Sparowes, p.g.lost**

REMFRY DEDMAN

PRESS



## ANNA VON HAUSSWOLFF
### *Live At Montreux Jazz Festival*
SOUTHERN LORD/POMPERIPOSSA

*Transcendence and terror from Germany's artist extraordinaire*

Having hosted everyone from Miles Davis to Deep Purple, the Montreux Jazz Festival is no stranger to eclectic acts or scintillating performances. Appearing in 2018 at the request of Nick Cave, Anna von Hausswolff and her band seem intent on putting everyone through the emotional wringer. The band coo, wail and smash through an electrifying set culled from *Dead Magic* and *The Miraculous*, with Anna offering bat-bothering whoops one moment and vengeful howls the next as the sonic majesty hails down around her. The clangour of *Ugly And Vengeful* is positively hymnal, while *Come Wander With Me/Deliverance* would give Neurosis a run for their obliterative money. All proof, as if any were needed, of Anna's power to dislocate jaws, whether they belong to diehard metalheads or chin-stroking jazz fans.

**FOR FANS OF: Årabrot, Swans, Sunn O)))**

ALEX DELLER

## INFECTED RAIN
### *Ecdysis*
NAPALM

*Moldovan djent quintet all but abandon their idiosyncracies*

Infected Rain used to be promising. Although their barrelling prog metal was yet to truly mature, they suggested a genre-smashing future, jamming melodeath, post-rock and even rap into their oeuvre. Then they released *Endorphin*, an album that neutered their eclecticism and transformed them into a duplicate of new label-mates Jinjer. As a result, follow-up *Ecdysis* is a husk of what could have been. It's a collection of occasionally clean-sung djent, the only hints of the eclecticism they've lost manifesting through fleeting synthwave segues. Worse, though, is how much it pales against the Ukrainian masters. The melodies fall flat, the riffs are generic and the lyrics (*Fighter*'s *'You got this! You're a winner! A fight machine! A killer!'*) cause aneurysms. Infected Rain have sacrificed innovation for sloppy imitation, and it's maddening.

**FOR FANS OF: Jinjer, Twelve Foot Ninja, Spiritbox**

MATT MILLS

## KING BASTARD
### *It Came From The Void*
SELF-RELEASED

*Doom-psych jams from the unruly realms of outer space*

The skull-in-a-space-helmet motif has been conspicuously popularised by Iron Maiden and Orange Goblin, and this NYC doom-psych quartet's co-option is your first clue that their debut might struggle to assert its own identity. This sort of lumbering, freeform space-doom isn't as easy as it looks, requiring full immersion for impact, but these heaving soundscapes meander quite restlessly. Before the repetitive chords get a chance to become hypnotic, they're cut off by passages of quiet wah-wah wig-out or puppyish attempts to go sonically crazy with squealing sax blasts, juddering synths or madly plucked strings. At this early stage it all feels fairly haphazard, but as with all instrumental stoner jam bands, there are moments of visionary chemistry and well-realised ideas, and plenty enough promise to anticipate better next time.

**FOR FANS OF: Sons Of Otis, Sleep, Electric Wizard**

CHRIS CHANTLER

## THE LAST TEN SECONDS OF LIFE
### *The Last Ten Seconds Of Life*
UNIQUE LEADER

*Pennsylvania's veteran deathcore troupe turn up the heat*

This deathcore four-piece formed in 2010, albeit with a different line-up, and this self-titled sixth album stays true to their sound while increasing the ferocity. It has a deliciously brutal opening courtesy of *Invictus Into Fire* and then rolls into familiar eccentric aggressive-meets-euphoric territory as they intertwine death and nu metal with John Robert Centorrino's deep, guttural growls, reliably heavy riffs, and moments of synth and samples. *Hate What You Love* has a creepy Korn vibe, *Vampire (A Blood Ballad)* is a delirious mix of loopy and crushing, and *Birth Of The Butcher* is equal parts twisted and emotional with poignant melodies, atmospheric spoken word, and deliberately crazed fretwork. It's not an entirely consistent album, but *The Last Ten Seconds Of Life* offers another hypnotic and intense ride.

**FOR FANS OF: Oceano, Fit For An Autopsy, Slipknot**

NIK YOUNG

# SMALL MERCIES

***Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'***

## APES
### *Lullabies For Eternal Sleep*
TRANSLATION LOSS

Apes' second album is all about stirring Old Man Gloom sludge, death metal sewage and wind-tunnel grind into a bubbling cauldron of demon's blood instead of the maple syrup you'd expect of maniacs from Quebec.

CONNIE GORDON

## GREAT AMERICAN GHOST
### *Torture World*
MNRK HEAVY

This metallic hardcore three-piece keep getting better. These four tight, distinct tracks swerve between brutal and dark to atmospheric and anthemic, with *Womb* being particularly exhilarating.

NIK YOUNG

## HADAL MAW
### *Oblique Order*
BLIGHTTOWN

Distilling a wealth of ideas into 18 minutes, the Aussie tech deathsters offer their most compelling material yet. Closer *Vile Veneration* goes from opulent leads to introspective realms while engulfed by a menacing atmosphere.

ADAM REES

## HANGING GARDEN
### *Neither Moth Nor Rust*
LIFEFORCE

On the sixth EP for this Finnish goth/doom/death septet (following seven albums), the goth bit is emphasised across six eclectic tracks, from pacey beauty-and-the-beast workouts to weepy piano interlude and electro remix.

CHRIS CHANTLER

## IMPENDING DOOM
### *Hellbent*
MNRK HEAVY

Flashes of modern production occasionally lift *Hellbent* above the mediocre. However, Impending Doom's reluctance to stray too far from the brutal slowgrind deathcore blueprint marks this as little more than a passing curio.

REMFRY DEDMAN

## MIZMOR
### *Wit's End*
GILEAD MEDIA

Portland's doom maestro follows up 2019's *Cairn* with two long, high-concept tracks. The title track's grating misanthropy is offset by *Pareidolia*'s reverent ambience, both inspired by humanity's flair for self-destruction.

TOM O'BOYLE

Lawnmower Deth straddle the Nottinghamshire/ Berkshire divide

# LAWNMOWER DETH

## *Blunt Cutters*

CHERRY RED

*Mansfield's masters of mucking about return in daft glory*

**METAL FANS OF** a certain age will always have a soft spot for Lawnmower Deth. A lager-fuelled riot of goofy thrash metal, punk rock and Olympic-standard titting about, these Nottinghamshire reprobates released three ridiculous but great albums in the 90s, and always seemed to be having more fun than everyone else. These days, thanks in part to numerous performances at UK festivals, metal fans of other ages are obliged to join in the fun too. After all, who can dispute the uplifting power of listening to what is now a bunch of middle-aged berks in shorts and stinky old tour shirts? Exactly.

Arriving a slightly tardy 28 years after their last album, *Blunt Cutters* is immediately identifiable as the best-sounding record Lawnmower Deth have ever made. Opener *Into The Pit* is a certified ripper, showcasing the fact that, all silliness aside, these veterans have sharpened up over the years and are a much tighter and more destructive unit than they were when they recorded *Betty Ford's Clinic* and *Satan's Trampoline* back in the day. In every other respect, *Blunt Cutters* is a big, stupid dose of top-notch Lawnmower Deth rowdiness. There are songs about priests (*Now He's A Priest*), snails (*Raise Your Snails*), unsavoury ailments (*Space Herpes*) and, perhaps inevitably, gelatinous grease-remover Swarfega (*Swarfega*). There are countless shout-along choruses and moments of pit-inciting yob-metal fury. And, as is only right and just, there is a large and laudable amount of gleeful idiocy, all delivered with a lot of twinkly-eyed charm and genuinely impressive levels of metal-as-fuck energy. Still bouncing on Satan's Trampoline and spreading a little joy in the process, Lawnmower Deth have still got it. Welcome back, you magnificent bell-ends.

**FOR FANS OF: Evil Scarecrow, Municipal Waste, S.O.D.**

DOM LAWSON

# MAKTKAMP

## *I Affekt*

SELF-RELEASED

*Norwegian hardcore punks still paying tithes to you-know-hoo*

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and in Norway, where the average citizen has spent years trying to figure out Kvelertak's popularity, flattery via imitation is a growing market. Oslo's Maktkamp have borrowed heaps of influence from their owl-loving heroes to augment their melodic punk with spidery classic rock guitar (*Krenkefest*) and motocross race riffage (*Dressmann*) as Kjetil Elverum's powerful vocals are bellowed out in the mother tongue. *I Affekt's* similarities to Kvelertak often veer too close to tribute territory – *Fyr Av Alt!* and *Skattejakt* even lift recognisable guitar harmonies and leads – and it does relegate Maktkamp into that category of a band desperately needing individuation and their own identity.

**FOR FANS OF: Kvelertak, Blood Command, Every Time I Die**

CONNIE GORDON

# TONY MARTIN

## *Thorns*

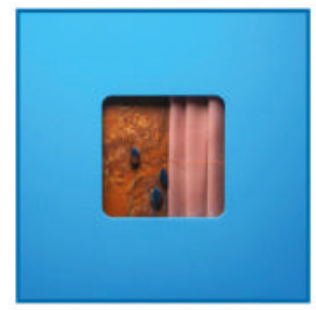
BATTLEGOD PRODUCTIONS

*Former Sabbath frontman adds more power to his pipes*

Tony 'The Cat' Martin is a reluctant solo artist; releasing his debut in 1992, followed by 2005's *Scream*, he's taken another 17 years to provide us with *Thorns*. Happily, it was worth the wait, the 64-year-old Brummie outclassing the earlier recordings with a raft of diverse and elegant but dark and weighty metal tunes, steeped in melodic classicism but incorporating discreetly contemporary touches. Tony's tenure fronting Black Sabbath was divisive, but over the years his impassioned crystalline pipes have only continued to grow in our affections. Except for a brief bit of cringy Americanised spoken word, these are convincing showcases for the Cat's undimmed vocal prowess.

**FOR FANS OF: Black Sabbath, Rainbow, Candlemass**

CHRIS CHANTLER



# MODERN ERROR

## *Victim Of A Modern Age*

RUDE

*Electro-tinged UK rockers set themselves a high bar*

Modern Error's debut album arrives alongside grandiose statements like, "It's almost a between life and death existence, like a biblical reincarnation, a state of evolution." At first glance, it seems a little over-zealous for what is essentially well-produced, electronic and industrial-tinged rock. There's no denying the band have a flair for cinematic visuals and know their way around a great hook. On *A Vital Sign* and *Error Of The World* bright choruses mesh with star-spangled waves of synth, while *The Truest Blue* sounds like Chvrches covering NIN's *Closer*. It's early days, but there's a wider vision here that could eventually take this Peterborough band somewhere special.

**FOR FANS OF: Pvris, Thirty Seconds To Mars, Chvrches**

DANNII LEIVERS

# WORLD SERVICE

*Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe*

# MENTAL DEVASTATION

## *The Delusional Mystery Of The Self Part I*

SUICIDE

This Chilean thrash quartet fully embrace prog here. The hard-edged riffs and acerbic barks recall Coroner, but the fretless bass is wobbly enough to make Steve Di Giorgio proud.

KEZ WHELAN

# NULLIFICATION

## *Kingdoms To Hovel*

PERSONAL

Hellbent on reducing the Philippines to a pile of smoking rubble, Nullification are old-school purists with pure venom in their veins. This is vicious and wild death metal, scarred by the hot sun.

DOM LAWSON

# OSHIEGO

## *Jajalut*

SEVEN KINGS PRODUCTIONS

These Singaporeans' relentless, thrash-injected death metal melds Far Eastern mysticism and righteous outrage as it takes on religious tyranny, the only downside being the mostly monotone vocals.

JONATHAN SELZER

NICK PARKES/PRESS

## MONDAZE
### *Late Bloom*
CHURCH ROAD

*Italian shoegaze heavies carve out a unique identity*

It's rare for a band to emerge and instantly be so distinct that you can summarise them in one sentence. Zeal & Ardor: black metal meets African-American spirituals. Sleep Token: piano pop that explodes into djent at the drop of a hat. With their first album, this Italian quartet have joined that elite club; they write shoegaze songs and play them with the tones of heavy metal. *Late Bloom* is hypnotically immersive, chords swirling while the vocals of Matteo Vandelli are as distant as they are delicate. However, every second crackles with a heavy metal crunch. The guitars have the same gritty tone as a doom band's, their abrasion only amplified when shrieking leads pierce through. Add in a mix that makes every snare hit feel like a blow to the skull and you have an addictive oxymoron of a debut.

**FOR FANS OF: Nothing, SOM, Slow Crush**

MATT MILLS

## NECROPHAGOUS
### *In Chaos Ascend*
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

*Swedeath veterans add a wicked twist to their purity*

Formed by ex-members of Swedish death metal crews Visceral Bleeding and Entrails, Necrophagous have a solid pedigree and, on this evidence, the artistry and intensity to back it up. *In Chaos Ascend* sits somewhere between those aforementioned bands, with just enough HM-2 snarl to conjure ancient spirits, but with plenty of cutting-edge precision and bombast to steer things away from the usual left hand retro path. At its best, on the mid-paced likes of *Blood On The Stone Of Thee Monuments* and *Horns Of Seven*, Necrophagous preen and glower with the imperious charisma of mid-90s Morbid Angel. On the grim battery of *Wolf Mother* and *The Vile Embalmed*, they're a ruinous blur of crazy-eyed devilry. This is death done right.

**FOR FANS OF: Morbid Angel, Vomitory, Vader**

DOM LAWSON

## NEEDLESS
### *The Cosmic Cauldron*
UPRISING!

*Eclectic Hungarians go big on a stirring, sci-fi colossus*

Writing a concept album is one of the most challenging things a band can attempt; Needless are doing this for album number two. This Hungarian crossover quintet have upped the ante considerably from 2019's *Heresy*, crafting a sumptuous, sci-fi epic about an astronaut granted the titular entity from a universe nothing like our own. Across an hour, Needless combine black, thrash, melodic death and progressive metal without the smallest hint of genres clashing or sounding out of place. The production job by István Simon is just as impressive, with *The Predation*, the title track and closing, 10-minute monolith, *Transgalactic*, sounding just as colossal as the cosmos the band have created here. It'll take more than one listen to fully appreciate, of course, but once that's achieved, Needless will burrow their way into your consciousness.

**FOR FANS OF: Brand Of Sacrifice, Rings Of Saturn, Blood Incantation**

ELLIOT LEAVER

## OAR
### *The Blood You Crave*
SELF-RELEASED

*Australian metallers exchange atmosphere for anxiety*

Something terrible must have happened to this Sydney collective in the four years since their debut EP, *Sect Burner*, as its more atmospheric, shoegaze-influenced black metal has given way to an infinitely more harrowing, claustrophobic and bleak sound. The title track immediately makes this clear, ploughing a mid-paced but apocalyptic-sounding stomp that has more in common with blackened hardcore acts like Hexis than, say, Alcest. There are still traces of light underneath the murk – the perhaps inappropriately titled *Doomed And Damned* is one of the album's more upbeat moments, bringing back those shimmering post-rock style guitars – but for the most part this album settles into a much darker, sludgier tone. The band wear it well, especially on the torturous *Souls Lost In The Frost*, which veers close to Peaceville-esque doom with its huge, mournful guitar harmonies.

**FOR FANS OF: Hexis, Underdark, Dragged Into Sunlight**

KEZ WHELAN

Underoath haven't got Red Light, Green Light entirely sussed

## UNDEROATH
### *Voyeurist*
FEARLESS

*Florida's expansive metalcore survivors keep their eyes on the prize*

**ONE THING UNDEROATH** can never be accused of is caution. Having embraced extreme metal, emo, post-metal and industrial across an intrepid and intelligent discography, the band rarely miss the mark whatever new target they've chosen to embrace. Even their venture into the middle-of-the-road rock on 2018's *Erase Me* was still marked by the band's characteristic audacity.

*Voyeurist*, their second album since a brief hiatus, sees the Floridan collective at a crossroad. There's the fearless desire to expand their sound and embrace the exciting new mutations heavy music has undertaken in recent years, while it also harks back to some of their most angular and addictive work that saw them climb the US charts. Opener *Damn Excuses* is an example of the former, kicking down the doors with its pugnacious hardcore bite and an abrasive air of confidence. While *Cycle* (featuring Ghostemane) and *Thorn* dial back on the heaviness, the synths and solid hooks take centre stage, with choruses that demand attention and fists held up.

Even when these gripping moments don't reach the same heights of yore, they're frequently matched by difficult, barbed riffs that switch the point of attack. The lush synthetic washes of *(No Oasis)* and *I'm Pretty Sure I'm Out Of Luck And Have No Friends* also offer tranquility in contrast to the ferocious dissonance of *Take A Breath*. In stark contrast to the acerbic opening, the dreamy, Deftones-esuqe dynamics of closer *Pneumonia* build to a hulking wall of noise, bringing *Voyeurist* to a harmonious conclusion.

After being eyed with suspicion in many quarters over the last 20 years – perhaps due to their religious beliefs – Underoath have proved once again that they're one of the most unappreciated bands of recent times, with their risk-taking strategy successfully paying off.

**FOR FANS OF: Bring Me The Horizon, The Devil Wears Prada, Code Orange**

ADAM REES

PRESS

Wiegedood: not quite putting the 'style' into 'hostile

# WIEGEDOOD

## *There's Always Blood At The End Of The Road*

CENTURY MEDIA

*Church Of Ra-inducted black metallers embrace the ethos of change*

**CHANGE IS AFOOT** in the Church Of Ra camp. First Amenra break from tradition by calling their last record *De Doorn* instead of the usual numbered Masses, and now affiliates Wiegedood have retired the *De Doden Hebben Het Goed* I-III moniker that adorned their first three albums in favour of the more ominous *There's Always Blood At The End Of The Road*. It makes sense to present this fourth record as a new entity, as whilst not a complete reinvention, it certainly finds the trio branching out beyond the confines of their early work.

Each chapter of that initial trilogy seemed to follow a formula, and although Wiegedood found room to innovate within that formula and keep it fresh, this new album does away with it entirely, allowing the band to venture into even more dynamic and atmospheric territory. *Now Will Always Be* is a great example, broadening the band's crisp, modern black metal sound out into a more hypnotic and darkly melodic dirge, complete with sinister Attila Csihar-esque throat singing. Or there's the way the unnervingly dissonant clean guitars of *Wade* transition into the blistering furore of *Nuages*, only to return during the song's stuttering, uncharacteristically spacious finale.

There's still plenty of that unrepentant piss and vinegar that made their earlier records so thrilling here, however. Opener *FN SCAR 16* is one of their most aggressive songs yet, based around a proper swarm-of-angry-bees tremolo riff that really bores its way into your brain, and the blast-addled *Until It Is Not* showcases some of the most pained shrieks guitarist Levy Seynaeve has ever put to tape. That extra intensity, combined with the more adventurous album structure and more confidently paced atmospherics, make this Wiegedood's most convincingly hostile release yet. A snarling beast of a record that proves they're so much more than just an Amenra or Oathbreaker side-project.

**FOR FANS OF: Mayhem, Oathbreaker, Der Weg Einer Freiheit**

KEZ WHELAN

## PARTY CANNON

### *Volumes Of Vomit*

GOREHOUSE PRODUCTIONS

*Scotland's colourful slam mavericks spew out a monster*

With a legendary logo and a reputation for drunken chaos, Party Cannon are obviously very silly. Less well known is that the Scottish quintet are one of the most destructive bands on the planet, and that their second full-length is a spitting, snarling and puking beast. Comprising 50 minutes of lightning-speed brutal death metal with regular detours into huge, lobotomised slam riffs, this is an ugly, snotty, unrelenting riot from start to finish. The production is heroically raw, nasty and punishing. The riffs are *disgusting*. *Nauseating And Unpalatable* may be the most fervently berserk death metal song ever. Party Cannon may be daft, but they will still fucking crush you.

**FOR FANS OF: Visceral Disgorge, Devourment, Vulvodynia**

DOM LAWSON




## POWER PALADIN

### *With The Magic Of Windfyre Steel*

ATOMIC FIRE

*Dragons, knights and derring-do from the land of the sagas*

The high-fantasy artwork and album title are all you need to determine whether you're going to love or loathe this. However, this Reykjavik sextet's debut strikes an enjoyably wobbly balance between shamelessly embracing all the genre's cheesiest clichés and injecting some fresh Icelandic personality into the form, so that even the more audaciously familiar-sounding material has some new twist and distinctive energy. Although the atmosphere is incredibly bright and perky, the occasional unsettling death growl and sinister chord takes the edge off the sugary jubilation. Despite the slight sterility and tweeness there's a more inventive flair here than you might expect from a band this on the nose.

**FOR FANS OF: Rhapsody Of Fire, Helloween, Dragonforce**

CHRIS CHANTLER

## PRIDELANDS

### *Light Bends*

SHARPTONE

*Australian metalcore crew get personal on their debut album*

Pridelands' full-length debut is a textured journey brimming with self-assured ambition and the power of personal testimony as the Melbourne metalcore quintet reflect on the dichotomy between love and loss, as well as humanity's ongoing impact upon nature. Opener *I Reach Into Your Heart* unfurls among a plethora of rhythmic twitches as soaring cleans are bolstered by gravel-laced rasps, whilst *Parallel Lines* and *Heavy Tongue* flirt with shimmering electronica as melodic ambience sits alongside potent heaviness. The latter's commanding, gloriously crafted chorus elevates it to anthemic status by its riff-drenched conclusion.

**FOR FANS OF: Northlane, While She Sleeps, Architects**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

PRESS X2

## SETYØURSAILS
### *Nightfall*
NAPALM

*German metalcore braves find something special inside the box*

Setyøursails' major label debut comes smashing out of the blocks with *Ghosts* and *Nightfall*. These tracks, featuring Annisokay's Rudi Schwarzer and Caliban's Andreas Doerner respectively, set the tone for what's to come: glistening metalcore rammed with catchy hooks and intense post-hardcore breakdowns, with sharp production from Annisokay's Christoph Wieczorek. It's a familiar sound that a million bands are out there are slinging right now, not least Annisokay themselves, and Setyøursails certainly aren't breaking any new ground, but it's vocalist Jules Mitch who puts in a performance that really makes things pop. He segues between honeyed intonations, throat-stripping screams and crystalline cleans with consummate ease on *Into The Storm* and *Fckoff*, all elevating *Nightfall* from a merely decent metalcore album to something rather more special.

**FOR FANS OF: Annisokay, Polaris, Asking Alexandria**

DANNII LEIVERS

## SOM
### *The Shape Of Everything*
PELAGIC

*Solar- and Pony-powered atmospherics from the US*

Featuring members past and present from post-rock contenders such as Junius, Constants and Grammy nominees Caspian in their ranks, shoegaze-speckled five-piece SOM have deftly side-stepped any 'difficult second album' jitters on their reputation-making latest effort. The eight-track LP is an epic, ethereal and exhilarating affair. Recorded in a solar-powered studio in New England, the gloom-laden opus serves as something of a love letter to *White Pony*-era Deftones. *Moment* kicks things off with a bang thanks to some careening guitars and a honeyed vocal from Will Benoit, while the soaring *Clocks* sees SOM show off their heavy side. Recent single *Animals* is the undeniable highlight and a big moment for the band. Partly inspired by the protests following George Floyd's death, it's an anthem in the making.

**FOR FANS OF: Deftones, Caspian, My Bloody Valentine**

EDWIN McFEE

## TOUNDRA
### *Hex*
INSIDEOUT MUSIC

*Madrid's long-running post-rockers still finding reserves of hope*

Toundra have been making music for almost 15 years, so you'd be worried if they didn't know exactly what they were doing by this point. *Hex* offers up another dose of expertly played and highly accomplished post-rock, and while the music might be instrumental the band peddle a positive message: a response to, and possibly even a salve for, the hate and anger consuming the world. Freeflowing riffs and rivulets of melody carom like billiard balls after a clever trick shot, intricately played but always opting for space and song over needless showboating. While they're hardly breaking new ground for the genre, there's still much to enjoy, from the sax weaving its way through *Watt* to the overriding sense of hope and positivity that's perhaps most prominent on closer *Son Of Winter*.

**FOR FANS OF: Mogwai, Don Caballero, And So I Watch You From Afar**

ALEX DELLER

## WOLFNAUT
### ///
FUZZPANZER

*Nordic fuzz-rockers get efficient with their riff machine*

After weathering a period of upheaval that saw Wolfnaut lose a guitarist and consider calling it quits, the Norwegian fuzz-lovers have re-emerged hungrier and heavier than ever. Despite being trimmed down to a trio, the band formerly known as Wolfgang have lost none of their power in the riff department (*Raise The Dead*) and their plainly titled third album is loaded with some speaker-bothering headbangers (*Swing Ride*, *Feed Your Dragon*). Amidst lyrics about economics, social inequality, Norwegian moonshine and hangovers from hell, Black Sabbath, Thin Lizzy and Kyuss are all referenced over the eight tracks. While *Gesell Kid*, a shameless rip-off of the latter's *Green Machine*, is a misstep, the band have never sounded better on efforts like the glorious Dio-era Rainbow-inspired *Catching Thunder* and the groovy falsetto-spiced *Taste My Brew*.

**FOR FANS OF: Greenleaf, Kal-El, Kyuss**

EDWIN McFEE

Worm Shepherd find the missing link between slam and symphonic metal

## WORM SHEPHERD
### *Ritual Hymns*
UNIQUE LEADER

*Massachusetts' symphonic metallers unleash a multi-faceted battery*

**IT WAS OBVIOUS** from last year's *In The Wake Ov Sòl* debut that Worm Shepherd weren't in the business of fucking about. Wonderfully bleak, bold and relentlessly brutal to its filth-encrusted core, these Massachusetts-based whippersnappers – their drummer being just 17 years old at the time of its release – blurred the lines between blackened death metal and something more avowedly twisted. And less than 12 months later, the quintet's follow-up arrives, proving to be eviscerating yet elevated in its sonic arsenal and aimed directly at the solar plexus.

Rising strings usher in a sprawling title track awash with haunting symphonics before the frantically elaborate *Ov Sword And Nail* opens up a nightmarish wormhole of lurching slams and fervent blasts, backed by Devin Duarte's menagerie of primal howls and bowel-wrenching gutturals. Granted, there's no denying the adrenaline rush delivered by the sonorous pound of *Blood Kingdom* and heads-down clatter of *Wilted Moon*, but it's that resolute affinity for all things oppressive and atmospheric that could truly summon the dead.

Enamel-peeling vocals aside, the rich instrumentation at work across these nine tracks will not only sends shivers down many a spine, it also conjures up all manner of spellbinding soundscapes as jaw-swinging solos encircle gentle keys and melancholy. Hair-raising Dimmu Borgir-esque synths feed off tech death-styled riffs in *A Bird In The Dusk* while *The River Ov Knives* is packed with claustrophobic melodies that verge on unearthly in their delivery. Its lyrics are spat with such venom that it's difficult not to fall completely under the band's aggressive spell. Deftly wielding the forces of light and dark in skilled measure, *Ritual Hymns* is a dynamic amalgam of many flavours of extreme music that will undoubtedly align this young band with the heaviest hitters on the scene.

**FOR FANS OF: Bonecarver, Monasteries, Lorna Shore**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

LIVE REVIEWS

# LOATHE

THE ASYLUM, BIRMINGHAM

*Liverpool's atmospheric sensations bring Birmingham to the boil*

**WHEN LOATHE STEPPED** out onto the stage to play Download Pilot this past summer, it should have been a moment of triumph. After all, 2020's *I Let It In And It Took Everything* had elevated their profile to the extent of marking them out as one of British metal's hottest new acts, even landing a spot at No.12 on the *Hammer* Albums Of The Year list for their subversive, genre-blurring antics. Yet, faced with muddy sound and near-incomprehensible vocals, Loathe's Download Pilot set ended up being one of the weekend's bigger disappointments – albeit by no fault of their own – making their December headline tour all the more vital in harnessing the momentum they had built up since February 2020.

A sold-out Asylum in Birmingham proves without doubt that it's been worth the wait. Small screens either side of the stage flash lyrics up throughout the show, creating an eye-catching display whilst never detracting from the band themselves, but betraying Loathe's ambition to play bigger rooms. And what a band they are. Playing *I Let It In...* in full, Loathe put the fullness of sound that characterised their second album front-and-centre in a stirring and visceral yet sublime display of sonic diversity.

The industrialised tech-metal grind of *Aggressive Evolution* sees Code Orange-style beatdowns set against Deftones-style anthemic weightless melody, the effect like being unmoored from the Earth's gravity and drifting up to the stratosphere, only to be sent hurtling back down by a planet-sized hammer. Loathe deftly navigate the rise and fall of their sonic dynamics to shine up the floor-filling brilliance their sound offers. With more than half the room opening out into a massive pit, there is a sense of physical release and intensity from the crowd to perfectly accentuate the energy onstage.

The real showstopper, though, is *Two-Way Mirror*. The song's calamitous beat and incessantly catchy vocal melody make for a perfect pairing when it comes to giving Loathe their own *Bleeding In The Blur* or *Change (In The House Of Flies)*, crafting a luscious ocean of sound and then completely enveloping the audience within it. A sea of raised fists and screaming fans attests to just how gargantuan a leap Loathe made with *I Let It In...*, the song altogether too big to be contained by any club.

Between-song chatter is kept to a bare minimum throughout the set, the band ploughing through with workman-like determination as they serve up a fresh platter of juddering riffs and snarls. Frontman Kadeem France is nonetheless an engaging and eye-catching presence. During the set's heavier parts, Kadeem snarls with the feral ferocity of a young Randy Blythe, while his headlong forays into shoegaze-inflected vocals see all movement halt as if he has suddenly become rooted to the spot, belting out each word with implacable force. Dancing, jumping and leaping down into the audience, at his most energetic there are shades of Black Flag-era Henry Rollins or Fever333's Jason Aalon Butler – a physicality that suggests at any moment he is going to be sent careening off the walls.

All thoughts of the December chill are washed away by the time the band blast through an inexorable rendition of *Screaming*, moving forwards with all the force and unstoppable weight of an armour-plated steamroller that turns the room into a furnace of moving bodies. Even the band's softer approach for songs like *Is It Really You?* does little to vent the atmospheric build-up, bodies that were minutes ago clattering into each other swaying and weaving to the rhythm while Kadeem himself does the same. There's a hypnotic air to it and the weight of the room's attention isn't lost on Kadeem, who for a moment seems utterly swept up in the tide before steepling his fingers in a gesture of thanks. "Birmingham, we've been Loathe and it has been an absolute pleasure," he offers. "Thank you for your energy."

The synth-heavy *The Things They Believe*, from the last year's instrumental album of the same name, brings the band back for a brief encore, a skull-stomping *White Hot* inviting the crowd to give it their all, particularly after Kadeem warns "Your chance is running out." Finishing on the colossal black metal-adjacent thump of *It's Yours*, Loathe leave no question as to whether they live up to the hype; this is a band on the up and utterly determined to get to the top in their own way. With other sold-out dates on this tour and more dates pencilled in for 2022, the choice is simple: get onboard, or get flattened by one of the most exciting prospects in British metal. You have been warned.

**RICH HOBSON**

Kadeem France: definitely toned

KATJA OGRIN

## THE SET

Aggressive Evolution
Broken Vision Rhythm
Two-Way Mirror
New Faces In The Dark
Red Room
Screaming
Is It Really You?
Gored
Heavy Is The Head That Falls With The Weight Of A Thousand Thoughts
A Sad Cartoon
I Let It In And It Took Everything...

**ENCORE**

White Hot
It's Yours

This Where's Wally's a bit easy...

Feisal El-Khazragi: master of multitasking.

Erik Bickerstaffe plays fast and loose

Loathe: clearly not the emperor's new clothes

Palm Reader: something borrowed, something blue

# PALM READER

## ORCHARDS/ PHOXJAW

GARAGE, LONDON

*Surrey's stealth metalcore crew re-equip themselves for glory*

**IF YOU LOOK** back at the previous decade of heavy British music, it's hard to think of a more unfairly ignored and unfortunate band than Palm Reader. The Woking quintet have spent a decade making consistently improving records, culminating in last year's phenomenal *Sleepless* – played in full this evening – but have constantly been overtaken in stature by acts of inferior quality. Tonight, after years of toil, they finally get to headline a London venue of significant stature… and, in an unbelievable stroke of cruel bad luck, have their gear stolen on the way to the venue. It's a sickener of a situation, and were it not for friends and peers clubbing together tonight may not have gone ahead at all.

Orchards go where other indie bands fear to tread

Palm Reader have picked excellent Bristolian stoner punks **PHOXJAW** and Brighton indie pop trio **ORCHARDS** as support, and both are superb this evening. The former energetically throw themselves about with wild abandon as they peel out their obtuse and propulsive riffs, and the latter charm everyone with some gorgeously sugary pop melodies that sucker to the brain on first listen. But no one can upstage **PALM READER** tonight.

The band have added extrxa guitarist Matt Reynolds of Haggard Cat and keyboardist Sam Jones to flesh out the many sublime intricacies and hidden depths of the *Sleepless* material, meaning that, even though they're working with borrowed equipment, they sound gargantuan. Vocalist Josh McKeown has maybe improved more than any member of the band over the years. His sandpaper howl of Palm Reader's early years now has evolved to the point where he can hit melodies and heartstrings on a song like the soaring *Willow*, and as they reach the album's climax with *Both Ends Of The Rope* you can tell this has become a very special evening for both band and their loyal fanbase, with an air of heightened emotion swarming the venue. The band return to encore with a short 'greatest hits' set of material from their other albums, including a brutal *I Watched The Fire Chase My Tongue* and a closing *Swarm* that threatens to turn the Garage into one gaping circle-pit. It would be criminal if this were Palm Reader's peak. Slow and steady wins the race, and there's still more road to be run for this band.

STEPHEN HILL

## CELESTIAL SANCTUARY

### CRUELTY/ZETRA

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Few things say 'Christmas' more than corpsepainted, space-age synth rock, so it makes sense for Church Road Records' 'Riffmas Party' to kick off with **ZETRA**. The screens and silver stalagmites onstage make the duo an intergalactic spectacle, while their beats remain danceable throughout their 30 minutes. **CRUELTY** don't want you to dance, though. Instead, their hardcore lacerates with beatdown after beatdown. The Brummies demand "a tribute of blood" and their acolytes indulge them with a pit as violent as any ritual sacrifice. **CELESTIAL SANCTUARY**, meanwhile, have clearly worshipped at the altar of Bolt Thrower and early Paradise Lost to manifest their blistering OSDM. Although the quartet claim to be at the forefront of the 'New Wave Of British Death Metal', their muddy guitar tone, hulking grooves and Karl-Willetts-like grunts lurch back to the genre's infancy. Heads bang immediately, then *Mass Extinction* aggravates the pace to get the Black Heart circle-pitting. Not even an impromptu encore of songs they've already played can mellow the mood; it's a strong testament to the addictiveness of these newcomers' riffs. "Death metal!" frontman Tomás Cronin howls before departing the stage, leaving you to enjoy your new Christmas present: neck cramp.

MATT MILLS

## TALONS

### TANGLED HAIR

BUSH HALL, LONDON

Before Talons take to the stage for their penultimate live performance, London trio **TANGLED HAIR** put on a great set that mixes self-deprecating between-song humour with some superbly mathy, pre-emo tunes in the vein of Spy Vs. Spy or Q And Not U. Very good. After 13 years of service, Hereford sextet **TALONS** deserve a bigger crowd than they get for this headline set, but those not present are missing out, because the band are superb tonight. Coming across like an amalgam of Godspeed You! Black Emperor and And So I Watch You From Afar dressed like the Droogs from *A Clockwork Orange*, they wring every last drop of sweat from their bodies as they plough into their often delicate, often beautiful, often crushing and often euphoric compositions. There's an idea that post-rock can be a rather passive, serious live experience, but watching Talons, it's difficult not to be caught up in the tsunami of noise and the careering momentum they create. Yes, it is challenging; yes, it can take a while for the explosions to arrive, but when Talons let loose, they're as powerful as any metal band. What a pity they're calling it a day.

STEPHEN HILL

DANI WILLGRESS

Architects have pulled some strings for their livestream

Dan Searle unleashes a timpani of destruction

Sam Carpenter: sheer perfection

# ARCHITECTS

## ABBEY ROAD, LONDON

*Brighton's emotive heroes relocate to the home of legends*

**EARLIER IN 2021,** Architects dropped an alternative version of *Animals* recorded with an orchestra conducted by Rosie Danvers at the infamous Abbey Studios. The intimate setting and pristine sound hinted at just how immense a full show in this style might be, but tonight exceeds expectations on every level.

Now they're joined by Parallax Orchestra – who appeared with Bring Me The Horizon at the Royal Albert Hall in 2016 – in an arrangement composed by their conductor Simon Dobson, and playing a complete livestream performance of latest album, *For Those That Wish To Exist*. They move through each track in order with immersive precision and without between-song banter. Musicians hold instruments still and turn pages almost holding their breath. Make no mistake, though, the energy is huge, and tiny gestures of excitement or stolen smiles can be spotted when songs are particularly epic. Cameras record every angle in a surprisingly unobtrusive manner, the direction is deliciously intimate, and the richness of the sound ensures that the lack of guest vocalists is barely missed.

Conductor Simon Dobson has a particularly emotive presence and, while he used to play in rock bands, he is also a trumpet player whose expertise in brass shines fiercely tonight, his players reinforcing the basslines and the calms and storms of the Architects' tracklist. *Black Lungs* dips and builds among an emotional string section, a new depth complements the melodies of *Little Wonder*, and Adam Christianson's backing vocals come into their own for *Flight Without Features*, which is handled with restraint to a powerfully poignant end. All that said, it is *Impermanence*, with its full-pelt screams and triumphant trumpets, that shines brightest. Frontman Sam Carter's vocals are sheer perfection all night but, for this, they are next level.

As the night closes, the livestream chatroom commentary moves from written shouts of "Open The Pit" to a steady stream of "T//S forever" in memory of late guitarist Tom Searle as *Dying Is Absolutely Safe* closes the show on a beautifully vulnerable note. After a brief pause for recovery, Sam humbly applauds the orchestra looking both emotionally drained and elated, before the credits roll, and we see them quietly packing up their gear. It is a rare glimpse into something that felt uniquely close and special to this band and an honour to experience alongside them as a fan.

**NIK YOUNG**

ED MASON

Neil Fallon goes fourth and conquers

# CLUTCH

**DOOM SALOON, MARYLAND**

*Maryland's misfit rockers take the backroads through three decades*

**AFTER EARNING PLENTY** of critical acclaim for their last livestream in December 2020, Maryland heavyweights Clutch return for the fourth round in their Live From The Doom Saloon series. Armed with a knockout, career-spanning setlist and performing under an illuminated wagon wheel, tonight the band are throwing the mother of all birthday bashes to celebrate three decades of grooves, riffs and pure rock fury, with proceeds from merch and ticket sales being donated to pancreatic cancer research non-profit, the Lustgarten Foundation.

Playing a track from each Clutch release in chronological order, the four-piece get the party started in style with a molar-rattling run-through of *Wicker* from 1991's *Pitchfork* EP, eschewing set staples and live favourites like *Burning Beard* and *The Mob Goes Wild* in favour of deep cuts that haven't been aired in moons. Frontman Neil Fallon and his band's refusal to repeat songs from previous Doom Saloon instalments has, as he puts it, forced them to "go to the back of the shelf", and it's resulted in a feast for their old-school fans.

*The Elephant Riders*' highlight *Wishbone* gets a welcome dusting down and although its rougher edges have been sanded off, it remains a devilishly funky, seriously groovy gem. Evergreen 2001 fan-favourite *Immortal* is another standout and serves as a reminder that football shirt-clad tub-thumper Jean-Paul Gaster is one of the best in the business, while *(Notes From The Trial Of) La Curandera* could level a mountain.

Admittedly, at times their normally fiery frontman looks a little lost without an audience to vibe with ("I know I say this every time we do this," offers Fallon, "but I'll never get used to performing in front of the camera like this") . However, the addition of two brand new, previously unheard tracks from their just finished, as-yet-untitled 13th album more than makes up for any awkwardness.

While *Slaughter Beach* seems to be a grower on first listen, set-closer *Strive For Excellence* affirms the future is bright for the band and is a powerful slab of blood and thunder that's sure to become a live favourite.

**EDWIN MCFEE**

## MYLES KENNEDY

**O2 ACADEMY, BRISTOL**

If Dave Grohl hung up his guitar tomorrow, Myles Kennedy would gain the title of 'Nicest Guy In Rock' without a second thought. On this, the opening date of his new solo tour, Bristol finds the Alter Bridge frontman as polite and courteous as ever, to the point that when he swears it feels somewhat out of place. The setlist, understandably, leans heavily on material from his two solo records, but he also throws in *All Ends Well* from *Fortress* and, more surprisingly, the title track from Slash's 2014 album *World On Fire*, both to a great response. That said, Myles himself has never been the most imposing of figures, and it's even more evident tonight than usual. When he has his main band or Slash and the Conspirators around him, there's enough going on elsewhere to balance out the unassuming shape he often cuts, but when the focus is solely on him, it's painfully obvious at how big the stage looks around him. It's not enough to call the gig a bust – his music was never going to be anything less than spot on – but it's certainly not the overwhelming triumph it could have been.

**ELLIOT LEAVER**

## LEPROUS

**ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON**

Leprous open their set with *Silent Waters*: a long-buried demo that hasn't been played in 15 years. That's one hell of a way to make a tour called From The Beginning instantly earn its stripes. In front of a sold-out Camden, the prog idols are comprehensively marking their 20th anniversary. The celebration charts their journey from metallic maximalists to nuanced melody makers by serenading the crowd with two tracks from each of their seven albums, in order. Legitimising the retrospective is returning ex-drummer Tobias Ørnes Andersen, who flanks Baard Kolstad as second percussionist for more than half the show. As a result, groove metal opera *Passing* is especially thunderous, before *Painful Detour* is a polyrhythmic barrage to the ear. *Coal's Foe* and *The Valley* transition to the vocal-driven Leprous of today, spotlighting Einar Solberg's infallible voice through bombastic chants. Thereafter, *The Price, Slave, Bonneville, From The Flame* and *Below* prove the anthemic apex as London echoes every lyric heavenly donated. Concluding the odyssey thus far are *Out Of Here* and *Nighttime Disguise*, lifted from 2021's *Aphelion*. The pair weave in pop, metal and math rock textures to prove that, even two decades deep, Leprous remain restless evolutionaries. Here's to another 20 years of unpredictability.

**MATT MILLS**

PARTNERS AND PACKAGING/PRESS

Boss Keloid: a band of quizzical stature

# BOSS KELOID

## TELEPATHY/TUSKAR/HWDU

**CLWB IFOR BACH, CARDIFF**

*Wigan prog-stoners spread the good vibes to the Welsh capital*

**FOR A SUNDAY NIGHT** post-game day in a very hungover Cardiff, props go to Swansea boys **HWDU** for kicking off the evening by smashing out their Clutch-infused grunge to only a handful of punters. Packing a respectable punch and swagger, the four-piece aren't bringing anything particularly new to the table but still manage to get things off on the right note.

**TUSKAR** take things to a grimmer, darker place. Taking the venue by complete surprise in a power move that commands the attention of the room instantaneously, the duo plunge into the thickest riffs these parts have seen for a while, all before anyone has a chance to get back from the bar. Using a whole spectrum of influences and sounds from jazz to straight-up death metal, they are an unpredictable force of nature that leaves the crowd breathless.

Though not as heavy, **TELEPATHY**'s instrumental showcase is one small step for the band but one giant leap for riff-kind. Mixing actual Apollo 11 soundbites into their polyrhythmic sludge adds a prolific and cinematic touch to their set, as the foursome manage to pull off a genuinely organic escapist experience that feels like a dark, melancholic daydream.

Headliners **BOSS KELOID** do everyone's brains a massive favour by directing the tone towards a mellower direction. Laying down thick meadows of fuzzy ambrosia, the Wigan outfit waste no time in plunging into their incredibly crafted progressive stoner metal. Taking a big chunk of their setlist from latest album *Family The Smiling Thrush*, a cavalcade of dense and juicy grooves easily fills the room with nothing but good tasty vibrations that build up and dive down much to our satisfaction. Feeding off the energy reflecting back from the audience and vice versa, their down-to-earth character and charm isn't lost in the aether of their otherworldly sounds. Considering the intimate nature of the venue and modest crowd size, tonight feels all the more special, which frontman Alex Hurst embraces, stepping into the arms of his fans while playing out the final riffs of what has been a stellar performance.

**HYWEL DAVIES**

Tuskar: arch enemies of the Flying Spaghetti Monster

DUNCAN EVERSON

Bleed From Within: hellishly good

# BLEED FROM WITHIN

## INGESTED

THE DOME, LONDON

*Scottish metalcore heavies prepare for ascension*

**IN THE SPACE** of four years, Bleed From Within have rocketed from total inactivity to one of Britain's hottest metal bands. 2018's comeback album *Era* featured some of the most rabid metalcore released in aeons and follow-up *Fracture* only aggravated that furore. Since then they've decimated the Download Pilot, held their own against Bullet For My Valentine and, now, have sold out their biggest ever London headliner. If the excitement is already simmering, then Manchester's **INGESTED** make it boil over. Singer Jason Evans dubs the band "your friendly neighbourhood slam kings" and, over 45 minutes, they earn their crown. Beatdown after beatdown ignites early-evening crowdsurfers, while a moshpit whirls at the heart of the Dome. On any other night this lot might have been show-stealers; unfortunately for them though, **BLEED FROM WITHIN** are about to bring arena-worthy spectacle to a club gig.

Ingested: the clan of slam

An LED screen consumes the entire backdrop as the Scotsmen rip through *Into Nothing*, drenched in a blood-red hue. Immediately, they seem genetically engineered to be the most exciting live act possible. Their metalcore backbone promises rampant breakdowns, alongside choruses that, thanks to the fusion of Scott Kennedy's growls and guitarist Steven Jones's cleans, are as anthemic as they are pummelling. Ali Richardson's muscular drumming, meanwhile, gives every snare hit a groove metal heft. As a result, everybody is incessantly mobile; those not circling in the non-stop pit are headbanging or howling lyrics during this communal catharsis.

Bar 2013 bruiser *Uprising*, the entirety of tonight's setlist is mined from post-hiatus material. Not only does this add credence to the idea that the band's current batterings are their most essential, it also incorporates new standalone single *I Am Damnation*. Its industrial opening and swift plummet into a death metal hellscape scream that, post-pandemic, this juggernaut will remain just as inspired and prolific as they were before.

With another album already slated for 2022, this evening feels like an epitaph to BFW as an underground band. They have the songs, they have the theatrics, they have the incorrigible fanbase; if, in 12 months' time, they haven't graduated to academy status, then there is no God.

MATT MILLS

## MONOLORD

### BLACKWATER HOLYLIGHT

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

In the best sense, **BLACKWATER HOLYLIGHT** are a shadow of their former selves. Every album has relieved them further of their early doom/psych trappings, becoming more emotionally affecting the further they drift into a state of heart-heavy exile. Tonight they focus on their latest album, *Silence/Motion*, revealing how much weight can be wielded in repose. There are still traces of Subrosa's extraordinary doom travelogues, but on the likes of *Falling Fast*, the cadences and Allison Faris's enervated yet entrancing vocals take on the resigned spiralling motion of a sycamore seed carried by a breeze. This is gently devastating magic being woven, uniting band and audience under its spell.

**MONOLORD** are greeted as though they come bearing commandments. If the opening *The Weary* finds them in more wistful mode, the minute they switch into monotone chants and riffs start throbbing like spelling out a landing signal for The Almighty Galactic Obelisk, a sold-out Underworld is reaching a near-religious state of rapt fervour. The Swedes might cleave explicitly to the Sleep/Om template of belligerent, bristling crunch and trance-state invocations, but tonight feels fundamental, as though they've been entrusted with the stoner staff of power and we're all revelling at its might.

JONATHAN SELZER

## RAGING SPEEDHORN

### EARTHTONE9/HERIOT

THE DOME, LONDON

**HERIOT** are a revelation live whether you are familiar with the band or not. Their bruising, deliriously heavy riffs collide with acerbic screams during *Dispirit*, which is about as subtle as a brick, and new single *Near Vision* sounds monstrous. Even a mid-set power cut doesn't deter them – they banter with the crowd before closing with a scorching *Cleansed Existence*.

**EARTHTONE9** are markedly different, their more progressive slant on metal mixed with grungy melodies. Inter-song banter is mostly kept to a minimum, with cuts from cult classic *Arc Tan Gent* alongside relatively newer material to speak for them. They suffer similar sound woes to Heriot, opting to play through it instead as sound techs race. Veterans **RAGING SPEEDHORN** are all swung mics, mosh calls and party attitude as they rattle through a set full of career highlights, even finding time to throw in an impromptu conga as security escort an overly keen punter offstage. It's both a celebration of bands still proudly carrying the torch for metal and a passing of it to the brightest sparks of a new generation.

WILL MARSHALL

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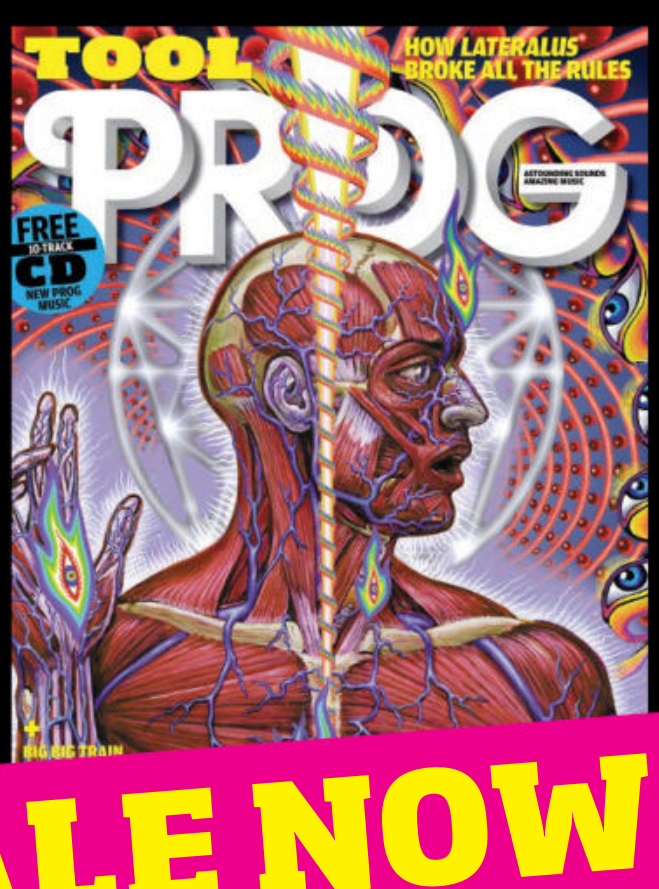


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# FIVE MINUTES WITH CHELSEA WOLFE

## Metal's gothic troubadour on magic mushrooms, telepathic band meetings and Chelsea FC

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURE: BEN CHISHOLM

**What's the worst thing about being a musician?**
"There's a misconception that we don't actually work. There ends up being a lot of people in your life who don't think you have a 'real job'. It's obviously wonderful work and I'm super-grateful to do it, but it is frustrating to interact with people who don't think I do anything, and songs and tours just pop out of thin air."

**What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?**
"One time Billy Corgan told me to write and record as a much as I can while I have mercury in my hands. When you're feeling most inspired, just roll with it."

**When was the first time you felt like a rock star?**
"When *Game Of Thrones* used one of my songs [*Feral Love* was used in the season four trailer]. I don't know if I felt like a rock star, but it was a very poignant moment in my career. I was a big fan of that show and ever since I was a little girl I wanted my music to be incorporated in some sort of cinematic way."

**What's the weirdest experience you've ever had on drugs?**
"I've written songs on mushrooms. I was at a New Year's party, I took mushrooms then I suddenly realised I wanted to be alone, so a friend drove me home. My friend was a painter, and her room was full of her paintings, all over the walls. I just sat in the middle of the room and looked at the paintings, they were moving. There was one that had a branch in it and the branch was swaying. I got my little, simple recording set-up out and recorded *Movie Screen* [from 2011's *Apokalypsis* album]."

**Do you have any tattoos you regret?**
"When I was first starting to get tattoos, the tattoo industry was very male dominated. There was a lot of heavy-handed male tattoo artists – these male tattoo artists digging into me, and some of them were incredibly painful. So more than the tattoo, I regret not speaking up for myself. It pisses me off that I just sat there and took this immense amount of pain like it was someone taking their aggression out on me."

**"I GET TAGGED IN CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB STUFF ON INSTAGRAM"**

**What was it like working with Converge on your collaborative album, *Bloodmoon: I*?**
"We played some shows together reinterpreting some of their lesser-played songs back in 2016 and became friends. We started talking about writing some new songs together pretty soon after that. At a certain point I organised a telepathic meeting because we were all over the country in different places…"

**A telepathic meeting?**
"I set a time where we would all find a quiet place to sit and channel our energy into the project. [Cave In frontman/ex Converge guitarist] Steve Brodsky was walking around New York City listening to the songs on headphones – he said he was getting some really cool visuals – and [Converge drummer] Ben Koller was down below LA in the desert. He said he was envisioning us onstage performing the stories. I was here in my writing room, I sat on the floor, brought out some watercolours and did an abstract painting envisioning each of us pushing our energy into the centre of this circle."

**Do you collect anything weird?**
"I don't know if it's weird, but I have a lot of tarot decks. I was given my first tarot deck when I was in my early 20s, then once I started connecting with them, they just sort of started coming to me. More recently, there's been a lot of interpretations that take the energy and most important visual symbology of the original cards, and interpret it to be a bit more modern and inclusive with gender and including more people of colour. It's really beautiful to see how it's expanded."

**What do you think of Chelsea's chances of winning the Premier League this season?**
"Ha ha ha! The funniest thing is, I get tagged in Chelsea Football Club stuff on Instagram. For a while it was happening a lot. I'm aware of Chelsea FC, I can see that it would be so fun to have a team and it would be a wonderful thing, but it's not my thing."

**CONVERGE & CHELSEA WOLFE'S NEW ALBUM, *BLOODMOON: I*, IS OUT NOW ON EPITAPH**

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Jimmy Page after seeing The Circus of Horrors & The Damned at London Palladium

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| 12 JAN | scunthorpetheatres.co.uk T | 31 JAN | whiterocktheatre.org.uk |
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| 16 JAN | raintonarena.co.uk/events | **Mansfield** Palace Theatre | 01623 633 133 |
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| 19 JAN | bit.ly/3iY5Bg4 T | **Colne** Muni Theatre | 01282 661 234 |
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| **Basildon** Towngate | 01268 205 300 | 12 FEB | bit.ly/2Q7AXPi T |
| 22 JAN | towngatetheatre.co.uk | **Buxton** Opera House | |
| **Swindon** Wyvern | 01793 524 481 | 13 FEB | buxtonoperahouse.org.uk T |
| 23 JAN | swindontheatres.co.uk T | **Manchester** RNCM | 0161 907 5555 |
| **Barnstaple** Queens Theatre | 01271 316523 | 14 FEB | rncm.ac.uk T |
| 25 JAN | queenstheatre-barnstaple.com T | **Liverpool** Olympia | 0151 263 6633 |
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